

Spring  
2022

Frühling

Primavera

However you want  
to say it, it's here.

This is the second  
issue of Patio.

seriously!

Featuring  
Camilo Restrepo  
Carlos Medellín  
Sarah Bronin  
Cruz García  
Gerardo Caballero  
Oscar Caballero  
Daniela Beraun  
Juan Carró  
Rebecca Carmi  
Sebastián Clifton  
Carlos Ortega Arámburo  
& Edgar Rodríguez  
José Luis Uribe  
Galera Collective  
Gabriela Dávila Rivera

PA  
TIO

2

PATIO

PATIO

A new era starts here. Or  
on the other side where  
the magazine starts...

Columbia University  
Graduate School of  
Architecture Planning  
and Preservation



ISSUE 1

Please take care of this little magazine.  
You're holding a little piece of history.  
And isn't that cool.



# PATIO

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# EDITORIAL LETTER

In November 2021, music superstar Bad Bunny appeared on mainstream late-night talk show *The Daily Show*. The interview centered on the Puerto Rican artist's broad range of creative pursuits, including his Spanish-language *Regeton* and *Trap* hits, his appearances as a celebrity wrestler and his dramatic portrayal of Mexican drug lord Everardo Arturo Paez. By then, Bad Bunny was underway to becoming one of the world's leading commercial artists — a triumph that was sealed just six months later upon the release of his album *Un Verano Sin Ti*, which set multiple global streaming records. That November night, when *Daily Show* host Trevor Noah asked Bad Bunny about the key to his success, he replied plainly, "I'm just real."

The colossal success achieved by Latin American and Latinx artists today is without precedent, as is their creative output. Many of these artists develop artistic works in their native language and speak to their own experience of Latin American life, yet they are consumed readily by global audiences. Social media platforms have become a breeding ground for critical discourse, made possible by the widespread distribution of mobile technology. Political posts by Latin American creators go viral. Outside actors scrutinize official narratives on satirical meme pages. Movements are transmitted on Live and *en la calle*. The arguments advanced of and about Latin American culture and politics are more pointed than they have been in the past, shedding light on new forms of criticality and empowerment.

So... what does it mean to be real in the Latin American and Latinx contexts? And why is it so powerful and desirable for a creator to "be real" in these contexts? Does artistic "reality" grant creative license across media and disciplines? Or does it empower the creator to be honest in their art (and trustworthy to their audiences)? Is "being real" simply a performative device for communicating cool detachment? Or is it a veritable instrument for grassroots empowerment?

How do these paradigmatic shifts shape our understanding of Latin America and the Latinx world at large? Why is the subversion of official and state narratives particularly important to this region? What are the implications of constructing decentralized systems of knowledge? Is the reality of "the streets" more real when it is the work of "outsiders"? Can "insiders" advance valid institutional critiques? Better yet, who defines "inside" and "outside" in contemporary Latin America? As formal protocols permeate informal spaces and official narratives are subverted by underground intelligence, the identification of alternative systems of knowledge seems more pressing than ever.

Real Talk is dedicated to cutting out the crap and speaking plainly about the construction and deconstruction of Latin American reality in today's world.

*Osvaldo Delbrey Ortiz, Editor-in-chief*  
*Luis Miguel Pizano, Editor-at-large*



# THE BRAINS BEHIND

## **Carlos Ortega Arámburo**

Carlos Ortega Arámburo graduated as an architect from Tecnológico de Monterrey. He works as an architecture critic and lives in Mexico City.

## **Daniela Beraún**

Daniela is a Peruvian architect currently finishing the masters in Advanced Architectural design at Columbia GSAPP. Previously, she spent 5 years working for a private practice in Peru developing institutional buildings, and for the Peruvian Ministry of Education. These experiences triggered her interest in the power dynamics embedded in politics, policy issues, and the architect's ability to operate in complex environments.

## **Sara Bronin**

Sara Bronin is a Mexican-American architect, attorney, professor, and policymaker whose interdisciplinary work focuses on how law and policy can foster more equitable, sustainable, well-designed, and connected places. She is a Professor of the Cornell College of Architecture, Art, and Planning, an Associated Faculty Member of the Cornell Law School, the Director of the Legal Constructs Lab, and a Faculty Fellow of the Cornell Atkinson Center for Sustainability.

## **Oscar Caballero**

Oscar Caballero is a Nicaraguan Architectural Designer & Researcher. Graduated with a master's in advanced architectural design at Columbia University in 2020. Besides working as an architectural designer in NY, he focuses on long-term research on the impact of the current regime on Nicaraguan politics and its relationship to the built environment.

## **Gerardo Caballero**

Gerardo Caballero was born in Totoras, Argentina, in 1957. He studied at the Architecture School of the National University of Rosario from 1976 to 1982. In 1986 Gerardo moved to the USA and obtained his Master in Architecture at Washington University, Saint Louis. Gerardo's works have been recognized, exhibited and published in America and Europe, and he has received many prizes and awards, as well as honorable mentions in national and international architectural design competitions. He is a founding member of Group R in Rosario.

## **Edgar Rodríguez**

Edgar Rodríguez is co-founder of "operadora," and architectural design instructor in the Syracuse University School of Architecture. Rodríguez earned a Bachelor of Architecture with Honors from Universidad Iberoamericana Mexico City and a Master in Architecture from the Harvard University Graduate School of Design.

## **Juan Cantú**

Juan Cantú is a Mexican-American architect who graduated from the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) with a Bachelors of architecture in 2019. As a student he began working for the Mies Crown Hall Americas Prize (MCHAP) office of publications and Wrightwood 659, the gallery showcasing art and architecture exhibitions. Upon graduation, he joined JL-Office in Barcelona, Spain where he participated in multiple research and design projects in Europe and Asia. In 2020 he joined Archivo de Ideas Recibidas (AIR) as a research collaborator. Juan was part of the editorial board of Future Tempos. He is currently based in London, UK, where he is pursuing an MArch. in Architectural Design at the Bartlett School of Architecture UCL. He is part of STEREO, a design group scattered throughout Mexico.

## **Rebecca Carrai**

Rebecca Carrai is a PhD researcher at KU Leuven, Belgium, where she co-taught the course Who Does Architecture?. Her PhD project, The IKEA Home, aims to offer a novel architectural perspective on the history of domestic space by looking at IKEA's impact, while unpacking the commercial actor's objects of mediation.

## **Sebastián Cillóniz**

Sebastián Cillóniz is an architect, teacher and researcher. He teaches design and theory at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP) and at the University of Lima and is the director of CILLONIZ:TALLER DE PROYECTOS. In 2016 he received the national architecture award (Hexágono de Oro) with the Plan Selva project of the Ministry of Education. He obtained a degree in Architecture from PUCP and a Master of Science in Advanced Architectural Design from Columbia University.

## **Galera**

Cindy Dallegre, Gonzalo Velez Da Porta, Nicolas Ardiles Gioni, Juan Murua Palacio. Galera es un equipo abierto de construcción, gestión e investigación en el campo de la arquitectura, el espacio público y el diseño en general conformado en 2019. El mismo cuenta con una serie de actores intervinientes - cada uno con una formación particular - que se asocian según la naturaleza del proyecto en pos de una mirada holística de los problemas. Es de interés indagar en paradigmas y temáticas coyunturales en las disciplinas del hábitat contemporáneo. Somos un sistema cíclico de preguntas / respuestas. Un grupo de amigos que trabajan con el espacio.



# THE 'REAL TALK' ISSUE

## **Gabriela Dávila Rivera**

Gabriela Enid Dávila holds a Bachelor in Environmental Design from the University of Puerto Rico School of Architecture (2018). Throughout her studies at the UPR School of Architecture, she began integrating social and political situations within Puerto Rico's current climate into her work. Her work addresses colonialism, Puerto Rican identity, social housing, and is currently collaborating with Amnesty International and Amnesty Puerto Rico on a funded project looking at new ways of engaging Puerto Rican activism. She is currently pursuing her Master in Architecture at Harvard University.

## **Cruz García**

Cruz García is a Puerto Rican architect, educator, author, theorist, curator, and artist working across different platforms to ask critical questions about the role of architecture, art and pedagogy in the construction of new worlds. In 2008 he co-founded in Brussels WAI Architecture Think Tank to contribute to the collective intelligence of architecture from a panoramic and critical approach oscillating from the design of buildings and master plans with a public agenda, to the creation of publications and pedagogical projects addressing questions of historical urgency. García is co-founding curator of critically acclaimed alternative art space Intelligentsia Gallery (智先画廊) in Beijing and founding member of the artist collective García Frankowski.

## **Carlos Medellín**

Carlos Medellín is a spatial designer interested in building spaces for social engagement and individual empowerment. He approaches design as a social practice through his work by exploring how space can address the structural inequality that shapes our society. Medellín has experience conceptualizing, designing, and managing artistic, architectural, and urban projects across the globe. He has also developed social entrepreneurship and interdisciplinary projects and participated in education as a teacher and researcher. As a citizen, Carlos Medellín has witnessed the extremes of Colombia's armed conflict and the resulting segregation that has defined its society. As a gay man has experienced how dangerous it is to move through spaces shaped by absolute notions imposed on individuals' class, race, or sexuality, what does not fit in the pre-existent idea must be forced to fit or left aside. And as an architect, has become aware that building is also to govern and that architecture is a political act that can define the ways we live and relate. That context explains why he understands the role of space as a mediator to overcome the different kinds of violence that come with deep social divisions.

## **Camilo Restrepo Ochoa**

Camilo Restrepo Ochoa is an Architect and Director of AGENDa agencia de arquitectura in Medellín, Colombia. He has been a Design critic at Harvard Graduate School of Design since 2020 and was between 2013 and 2016. He is the guest editor of a+u (Japan) March issue in 2022 about Colombia. His work has been nominated for the Mies Crown Hall Architecture prize 2022, and received the Cemex prize in Mexico for the Santuario de Nuestro Señor de Tula in 2021 in association with Dellekamp/Schleich. With the same project, they received the second prize by Fondazione Fratesole, for the best Church built between 2016-2020. In 2020 AGENDa agencia de arquitectura was selected by DOMUS Magazine as one of the most creative and innovative architecture studios of the world. His work has been published widely and its forthcoming book: Specific Ambiguity is to be published in September 2022 by Mexican editors Arquine.

## **Jose Luis Uribe**

Jose Luis Uribe is an architect from the University of Talca (Chile) and PhD in the Advanced Architectural Projects program at the School of Architecture of Madrid, UPM (Spain). He is the author of the books "Against the Tide" (Hatje Cantz, Germany, 2016) and "Talca, Cuestión de Educación" (Editorial Arquine, México, 2013) with which he has won the VIII Ibero-American Biennial Award for Architecture and Urbanism to the Best Architecture Publication (Argentina, 2014) and the DAM Architectural Book Awards (Germany, 2014). He was curator of "A contracorriente" Chile pavilion at the XV International Architecture Exhibition of the Biennale di Venezia 2016. He has been a juror of the IX Ibero-American Architecture and Urbanism Biennial (Brazil, 2016) and has given lectures at Harvard Graduate School of Design (USA, 2015), Escola da Cidade (Brazil, 2015) and RecyclArt (Belgium, 2014) among others. He is currently professor of the School of Architecture of the University of Talca in Chile.

## **Isaí Soto**

Isaí Soto is a Mexican graphic designer hailing from San Diego, California. He studies Sociocultural Anthropology at Columbia University. Isaí is the creator of the small-scale zine, 'Germazine', a personal, absurdist account of his life.

## **Patio Editorial Board**

Patio is an independent, student-run editorial platform focused on critical issues of the Latin American community and built environment. This issues board includes Osvaldo Delbrey, Rocio Crosetto Brizzio, Leon Duval, Luis Miguel Pizano, and, Guillermo Hevia.

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# PATIO TALKS WITH CARLOS MEDELLÍN.

León Duval

The interview with the Colombian architect Carlos Medellín started way before we even met him at his house in Brooklyn. And maybe the whole process of doing this interview is what makes it an extremely critical and urgent story to be told in this issue.

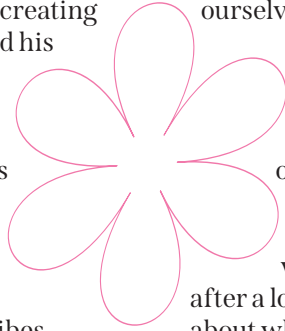
This interview, which at the beginning was supposed to be a commission of a short text about teaching and methodologies, that we as Patio wanted to cover for this issue –Real Talk–, soon became something else in the making of the previous conversations with Carlos. In the midst of all the conversations held, the idea of an online commission soon turned into an in person interview with Carlos at his home, in his patio. This, because Carlos was emphatic in doing what we were inviting him to do, to have a Patio Talk. However, in this process of negotiations, we realized that this talk could become not only a way to understand Carlos's work but also a way to understand ourselves as a group and our role as a Latin magazine developed by students of architecture at Columbia University today.



This story begins before reaching out to Carlos. It started by chatting about him and his trajectory with a mutual friend, Ruben Gomez, who happens to be a Latin student, and partner in GSAPP and former workmate of Carlos back in Colombia. The conversations started creating a myth around him and his critical opinions about contemporary architecture and the philosophy guiding his design methodologies and pedagogy. However, the most inspiring part was the relationships he describes between justice, space, and the role of storytelling and narratives in understanding a context.

On February the 15th, Carlos and I started exchanging WhatsApp messages in the morning. I invited him to participate in this issue, and happily for us, he accepted. We were supposed to talk by phone later that day to arrange the terms and conditions for his participation, but we didn't speak until the 1st of March, fifteen days later, due to a series of academic events and responsibilities that made it impossible. All of this, a posteriori, became the introduction of this talk, which in many ways turned out to be an unexpected mutual interview, where questions were going back and forth between everyone of us. That call of the 1st of March became a turning point from where after discussing my

experience with Osvaldo Delbrely and Rocio Crosetto we realized that it would be something unique and different, and that we should be prepared for the unexpected and let ourselves be carried away by whatever happens. So, we didn't plan, and we decided to just present ourselves to talk on Carlo's Patio.



Coming back to that initial phone call, where we spoke for approximately one and a half hours, I started explaining who we were and what we wanted from him. So, after a long talk and explanation about what Real Talk and Patio is, he asked a crucial question: "You called yourself Patio, which has a lot of meaning to me. So, if you plan to have an informal conversation with me about architecture and Latinamerica with that Patio spirit, then why are you using complex words, technical concepts, and in the end, that formal language?", "how are you different from any other publication that wants to address architecture?" Those questions were crucial. After explaining to him that the informality that we are looking for is the one that we could have on the Patio of a home when having a beer with a friend, in a space where different types of conversations can take place and where the flow of a conversation is more natural, where political correctness doesn't exist. He immediately shifted our initial proposal and invited us to his house to have a beer on his Patio to talk. That is precisely what

our name suggests. So, later that week, on a Friday evening, Osvaldo, Rocío, and I took the train from Morningside Heights towards Fort Greene Park in Brooklyn to talk in Carlos Medellín's Patio.

The meeting with Carlos began at 7:00 pm on his Patio. Still, due to the coldness of the night, it later continued in his basement. It was a success because we discussed many of the topics we wanted and had a dynamic and horizontal conversation between the four of us. As a result, we lost any hierarchy and formality typical of an interview (as a fixed procurement), and instead we had an open and informal conversation in the spirit we were pursuing. But, what made the biggest impact on us, was the importance Carlos gives to words, concepts, conversations, and narratives for understanding and creating space and for making architecture accessible. When we left Carlos' house, we kept

discussing that perspective on our way back. We also kept thinking about his work with restorative justice and the story of "The hero's journey."

On the Patio, we started talking about his teaching experience at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). He's nowadays focusing on the values of Restorative Justice to generate spatial projects with students. But, they are not only working focusing on architectures for legal frameworks or for the penal system infrastructure, but on the philosophical and ethical aspects of the concept. As he explained, his teaching methodology starts with a syllabus designed as a series of exercises that are not mandatory to be fully completed or followed from A to B to approve the course. There aren't fixed deliverables for them. Instead, each student advances at their own pace and how their own process allows. The main goal is to reflect on why the process is what it is and what it means for each student to understand what they care about, the kind of reality they want to help build, and their own workflow. Carlos' class is the other way around in an academic environment without the typical



pressure to become sleep-deprived to accomplish a task. The students get points for protecting their well-being and sleeping well. To us, that sounds radical, *per se*.

Later on, we kept talking and sharing experiences. We entered the first chapter of our conversation, which we can call “Narratives”. Carlos’ classes begin by opening a space for the students and himself to get to know each other. So, through a personal land acknowledgment, they explore themselves, their relationship with the land and aim to shift the narrow-minded and technical way territory is usually

understood. Learning the stories of violence, resistance, and take-care practices in a specific territory gives them tools to pass from acknowledging to action.

Carlos believes that one of the biggest flaws in architecture is the refusal to explore oneself and our relationship with the land. But, on the contrary, he explained that knowing oneself allows us to understand how and where to act. In his words, “we need to overcome the toxic positivism of the architect who believes that they can solve anything with a design. Which is a lie. Sometimes it is better to do nothing as an act of respect.”

Then, Carlos explained another exercise, “Negotiating on an uneven table.” He argues that when negotiating, we tend to assume that we are equals when actually we aren’t. So we lie to each other by saying that.” Thus, the students work in pairs, and





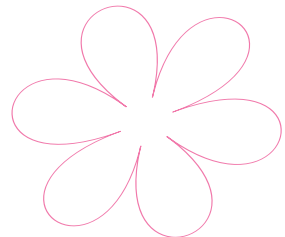
the first thing they do is sit at a table and share their stories with each other. Therefore, they can explore who they are, where they come from, and grasp their inequalities. Then, within that base, this exercise concludes with the students negotiating and creating collective and individual goals and boundaries for designing and giving form to that “uneven” table.

Finally, the last exercise aims for the students to create a space that makes justice. But to define what justice means, they need to work with a more-than-human ally. “Like that tree over there” –pointing to a huge tree in the corner of his Patio–. That’s how a space of justice gets crafted. “That space isn’t necessarily a building; it can’t be,” Carlos says. Rather architecture here can be a moment, a ritual, a building, a public space, an object that creates space, a gathering, a tree. So the evaluation is on the success of creating justice for them and that “tree.” While doing that, he highlighted to us that the point of this is to explore architecture as relationships. Here the building is only one aspect of it. At that point, we were engaged because of the honesty and reasonableness of his discourse. We listened raptly while drinking our beers.

The second chapter, which we may call “The hero’s journey,” started after talking about his experience at CCA. Carlos shared why and how he decided to move from his early comfort zone, first as a student and then as an architect and teacher,

following the expected narrative. However, Carlos wanted to expand his limits beyond architecture. So, he went to CCA in San Francisco, California, where he did a MAAD program but with a personalized curriculum focused on space design and art as social practice after negotiating with the University.

One of his biggest influences there was the art teacher Susanne Cockrell. With her, he first started talking about the necessity of “neglected spaces” such as queer spaces, among others. “I understood that architecture is a violent act. For example, this tree is very important [pointing to the tree on his Patio].” And continued, “I believe that as people, we have beliefs, and those beliefs generate narratives, which are how we live. [for example] I believe that I’m a man, and I was told that always men need to be with women. As a gay man, breaking with that narrative is un Camello [too difficult]. These kinds of narratives also control the access that one has to experience. For example, being a black person or a Latino in the US



comes with narratives of access. Being a woman is another different narrative. They [the narratives] drive our decisions and how others see us. It is like a matryoshka: one inside another.

Architecture as a discipline has been restricted. It has been under the control of white man as a narrative for too long, which means that it has a sort of single biography behind it.” When I was writing my work at CCA, I had long conversations about my ideas with my friend Adeola Enigbokan, who referred me to the Hero’s journey. Somewhere in the ‘50s, the American writer Joseph Campbell invented a circular diagram where a man appears, meets an unexpected power, gets scared, and leaves it. Still, then a catastrophe happens and takes back the power. Then the Hero saves the world or something like that”. That journey is how many of the heroics stories in pop culture –like Star Wars– have been created.

Designers of different types use the ‘User’s journey,’ which seems to be a simile of the Hero’s Journey. It consists of the designers creating archetypes of users through design research. To develop any service or product, they do participatory practices - interview people. With the outcome, they draw a ‘journey’ where they can see the extremes of users (the poorest, the richest, the



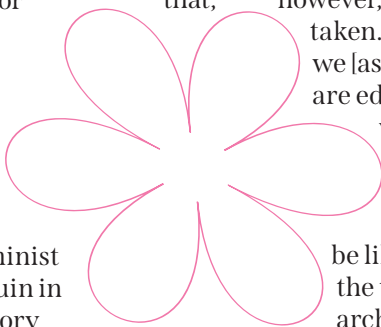
blackest, the whitest, the woman, the man, the secretary, the boss, etc.). But, by doing that, they aren't really honoring people's stories. Instead, they standardize experiences.

So, by pretending objectivity and constructing "standardized journeys," they exclude people's stories. To me, this operates as an excuse for designers to be permissive in saying that they're creating a shared reality. But instead, they're making a specific reality, leaving behind what isn't general or archetypal. Precisely because there is no care or intention to address the unevenness.

Then, Carlos spoke about an essay that became very significant for him in his exploration. "The feminist sci-fi writer Úrsula Le Guin in her *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, speaks about the idea of the "Hero's Journey" in a critical way. She tells a story in which before men created the first weapon to kill Mamuts, there were women picking berries and nuts in the field, and for picking more food, they designed a 'carrier bag.' However, her story is not only claiming that as the first tool ever created. Instead, she also claims the importance of honoring everyday stories. "For Le Guin, society has perpetuated a collective narrative that needs to have a big drama and a hero. That's a very white conception of a hero, Medellín argues, because the world isn't ending due to a

villain or a catastrophe and being saved by a hero. I have been talking a lot about this with my friend Adeola. Instead, the world is ending every day and every minute for many people.

Those stories are not being considered. Medellín realized that if he really wanted to work with people, a "survey method" would not be enough. He needs to connect with people. That means configuring the relationships instead of being in an office shaping interviews in the form of data to later support any arbitrary decision that, however, was already



taken. "I believe that we [as architects] are educated in that way. We have been taught a craving to be heroes, to be like "him:" like the teacher, like the architect-boss. To

compete to be the best, to desire Pritzkers, and if we don't make it, it has to be because we're mediocre or untalented." By doing that, we are also taught to treat the one with 'talent' better. That happens not only in the architecture field but is a common practice in academia. "And the idea of 'talent' is the most reductive and unpleasant thing in the world."

The third chapter could be named "Restorative Justice" and, in part, works as an explanation of the first conversation topic about his teaching methodologies and the



different types of exercise done with his students. I started talking about my experience learning about the prison system in the US, and specially in New York State due to the subject of my Studio lead by Laura Kurgan, so when I asked Carlos about how he understands the idea of prison and justice in relation to his work in that

field. He started by narrating his personal story because, as he said, our stories matter when explaining our positions. Carlos was born one year after his uncle died alongside eleven or twelve other magistrates in the Justice Palace of Colombia in a crossfire between the M-19 Guerrilla when the military entered the Palace to take it back and burn it all down. Following that event, the first peace deal between the Colombian government and a guerrilla was signed in the 90s. However, it left a lot of open questions because neither the government nor the guerrillas were fully accountable for what happened in the Palace of Justice of Bogotá in 1986. Later, in the 2000s, a new building for the Justice Palace was designed and built. It opened in 2004 as a form of “rebuilding justice” after what happened.

His uncle was the Justice Supreme Court magistrate Carlos Medellín -Carlos was named after him. That particular story

has haunted and defined him since then, even without having met him. That narrative has been both a claim of my family for justice and also a healing method to deal with the grief.

That event and the way that justice left those questions without answers has led him to distrust that type of justice system. “I can’t trust in a building that appeared out of nowhere and in a system that didn’t answer questions.” So, when he received the commission to work with the Colombian justice system in Bogotá to design the first space for restorative justice, the question wasn’t about which kind of alternative space could be built. The real question was how space could hold conflictive and sometimes opposed narratives, so they can be worked together to create a new story that embraces those questions. The Punitive system is unable to answer.

Restorative justice is a concept first developed in Canada within its penal system. But it has, little by little, gained a lot of traction in the US. However, it has also been used to approach systematic outbreaks of violence in conflicts like the South African and Colombian. The Colombian peace deal was signed in some stands with a restorative approach, in which another court was created to judge only those cases part of that conflict. It is a mix of restorative

and punitive practices. In 2016, the peace agreement was voted upon, and despite being rejected by the majority of Colombians, the president signed it himself anyways, leaving a strongly divided society.

That whole story was the main subject that guided Carlos and his partner –Nicolás Paris– on the path of designing and learning how to act within the restorative justice framework. They managed to carry out activities with young offenders and victims outside of penitentiary facilities. The

restorative path in Bogota is granted to an offender only with the permission of the victim case by case. By choosing this way, Carlos

continued saying, a sort of bond and intention is created between offender and victim. It is an opportunity for those involved in the conflict to have the power to deal with it. No one else, no judge (or any heroes), will make decisions for them. With the professional guidance of mediators (psycho-social workers), the aim is to generate accountability for the acts and to start a mutual healing process between those involved.

Anyways, we were told that this alternative process is in an early stage of development, counting no more than two hundred cases so far, but still, Carlos Medellín

trusts that it is a way to actually solve conflicts and face traumatic conflicts between people within the Justice System. It is a kind of practice that gives back the right to decide and negotiate with people (which is the most important thing). For him, justice and space are narratives because they literally depend on who decides what is built and what is fair, but most importantly, who can tell the truth and their story in the process. “That is how I understand architecture and justice are related in this way. This space [the restorative justice space] is a space to tell stories of what happened in a conflict, but to be honest, the narratives always come from way before.

The space we designed iterates from object to architecture, from architecture to a mobile artifact that goes around the city, from that to a communication system and graphic design, and from there, to manuals so the model can be replicated in other cities, etc... (this summary is mentioned in relation to a project designed by Fundación Horizontal led by Carlos at that moment, which involved those different mediums in performing justice in space).

The experience of designing that space woke me up. It let me see that until then, I had been an architect who really wanted to be a hero. The truth is that I was acting, perhaps

feeling I was better as if I could help somebody that hadn't even asked me to. "In that way, he wouldn't be able to really learn anything from people's stories because he would always be trying to find a "solution to problems" through buildings and objects, as architects are educated to do. To get recognition. "But now I don't see that anymore. I think that system of thought needs to be dismantled. To me, prisons are the same. They become useless because they do not solve any structural problem."

The conversation with Carlos lasted until very late. At some point, we needed to go back home, most of all because Osvaldo and Rocío needed to catch a flight early in the morning. However, the talking was so immersive that we could have easily stayed talking the whole night. But, before leaving, Carlos reminded us of the question he made on that initial phone call, which happened to turn into this patio conversation.

### ***Why did we name our magazine Patio? Which Patio?***

Osvaldo, the only one of us who was part of the founding team of the magazine, answered his question; even though we could not have any consensus among the group: "the idea of a Patio emerged as a common space despite differences of understanding, for people to



# ¿FROM REAL TALK TO REAL NARRATIVES?

**Camilo Restrepo Ochoa**

A hard cut is required from the current narratives of Latin American architecture. A narrative that many architects of the continent have accepted as true, and used in a strange opportunistic way. It requires getting away from the circulating clichés that are easy to find in any publication about Latin America, and that many have helped build with their position, no matter where the publication comes from, be it local or foreign, digital or printed.

## ***1. The idea that architecture in Latin America is made out of a few resources.***

*Real Talk* is to accept that we actually don't work with limited resources. Everyone, everywhere does. Architecture in each place has its own constraints, either economical, technical or legal. We work with what we have at hand, as everyone does no matter where they are.

We need to accept that our material palette, technology and engineering is limited, and feel fine about it. But we have to stop arguing that our architecture is less interesting because of that. It is common to attend a lecture of Latin American architects and listen to this statement as it comes out as an excuse, as a lament to not be working with big budgets. To keep the myth of scarcity alive about Latin American architecture, low budgets, only diminishes and distorts the values of architecture itself in this region. That attitude does not bring anything to the conversation, it keeps the critical values of how we value, judge and understand architecture, on a very limited concept; On one hand, because it states - wrongfully - that we hope and dream about doing it like first world countries do.

¿What for? ¿What is the purpose?

Maybe the resources that are at hand is our plain and simple reality. This limitation allows the space to be generous and more down to earth, let's say more pragmatic, allowing the building to exist rather than to be talked about. Removing the fact of scarcity forces us to think about the type of space we work with, ¿how do we understand space in Latin America today? ¿Do we have an idea of space that can be useful for our times, other than giving form to space with the hopes of being understood as artists?



## ***2. The assumption that Latin American architecture is mainly about social issues.***

*Real Talk* is to question if we really do architecture about social issues. And if we do, does it make it enough to be classified as good architecture? Attending social issues is not enough today, any good architect should pay attention to it, but needs to expand the conversation beyond it. The conversation needs to be open and expanded, only for one reason, *¿Are we necessary?* Good intentions are not enough to make good architecture. Its funny, even strange and sometimes uncomfortable, that when seen from abroad, if the project you are presenting does not expand on the idea of solving poverty, social issues or being made by workshops with the community, it immediately loses the interest of the foreign journalist, because in the end that is what they expect it should be, that is what we have accustomed them to hear and expect.

There are many architects in Latin America, that have never mentioned those words, and paradoxically their work is more resourceful on how they attend their immediate reality, bringing positive change to their contexts, allowing their buildings to have a clear and interesting dialogue with the contexts they work with, making the urban realm more democratic and safe, more public. They have been able to be necessary in their societies, by being responsible architects.

## ***3. The perception that architects in Latin America are very resourceful.***

*Real talk* is to simply recognize that we are not more resourceful than any architect in any other region is. Each region has its own problems and condemnations. In some parts the excessive construction code pushes creativity and ingenuity to blossom, in ways we never imagined. In other places the liabilities of even a super small project forces the architect to solve the problem by other means, absolutely unexpected. Again, it is not that we are not particularly resourceful, but we are perhaps too pragmatic. And there is nothing wrong about it. Pragmatism as a way of understanding a certain reality frame is what enables things to happen, for buildings or interventions to exist. Perhaps what is interesting around here, is that the city and the possibility to build from a very young age, allows the city and architecture to be a living laboratory of different types. Also the weather and climate, as being more or less mild, compared to extreme climates, allows the architecture to be archaic and primitive, giving a sense of not being excessive, giving the feeling of being welcome, open, collective.

#### *4. A common feeling that architects in Latin America are very sensitive toward the relation of space and materiality.*

*Real talk* is that a phenomenological discourse allows us to avoid a serious conversation about what we think and about what our real interests in architecture are. It is common to hear — in Latin American architects — about the “magical” relationship of a chosen materiality with light, but usually explanations and arguments do not go any further than that, leaving the audience a bit confused by such an announcement. There is no development, no ideas behind it other than the effects. Perhaps the reason for that is that phenomenological discourses as presented in many places, are just the right crouch to avoid thinking. Yes, the phenomenological discourse as commonly used around these places is about a very superficial perception of space, not to mention that there is almost no relationship with Merleau-Ponty and others, but instead, it turns out to be a cheesy poetry about how a material texture touches the spirit..... ¿Is that really possible?

Maybe the truth is, most of the narrative coming out of here finds it hard to be engaged with deeper disciplinary questions due to a lack of engagement with a theoretical side of the practice, and due to an extreme pragmatism, certain fear arises once we find out that our capacities are more simple, but not necessarily less talented. And then we try to cover that lack of theory with cheap poetry. Perhaps the material condition, explained previously in this text, is enough to understand that we are skillful and sensitive with the material because we find ourselves between conditions. Not too much industrialization, either fully a handcraft; But being able to work with both resources at the same time, gives us a beautiful and useful condition, that many times even for the inhabitant is technical transparency makes it easy to be repaired at a low cost. ¿Can we escape from the phenomenological turn to explain and understand what we do differently ?

## 5. *Latin America is Latin America.*

*Real talk* is that Latin America does not exist as a homogeneous region, and it does not have a common identity. Latin America is too diverse and complex to try to understand it as one piece. It is ~~not monolithic, and~~ perhaps between many places the only common thing is the language, ~~nothing more~~. To try to frame Latin American architecture as one, is as irresponsible as trying to talk about European architecture as one single narrative. Each place has its own logic, and even because of its geography within countries, there are small differences that change everything. Latin America is not just Latin America, it is the sum of many countries, cultures, and places, hard to be explained as one certain block. Understanding and explaining architecture in Latin America is complicated, nonetheless, a certain common thread on how space is made is similar, maybe running away from the idea of the absolute space, and avoiding the self-referential and purity in its form. Most of the architecture in Latin America is interesting because it is generous, open and willing to be public, in a direct and straightforward way towards nature, using it as materiality, not as ornament or for greenwashing intentions.

Once we have proceeded to have a Real Talk about the most common ideas and places about Latin American architectural narrative we should ask ourselves,

¿What are we willing to say?

¿What can we offer to the discussion from this frame?

¿What is our new narrative?

# What does Latin America contribute to the contemporary condition of architecture?

José Luis Uribe Ortiz

*This text corresponds to a narration built through the testimonies of 14 architects, editors and curators who attended the XI Iberoamerican Biennial of Architecture and Urbanism. In a lost hotel room in Asuncion, Paraguay. Each one answers a common question: What does Latin America contribute to the contemporary condition of architecture?*



## CARLOS QUINTANS (Spain)

I admire the most is freedom. It is realizing that the world is much freer than what we have been told and this makes you realize that there are work procedures that have nothing to do with what we are used to and that there are ways of life that have nothing to do with what we have been told, which are normal and are ways of life that open up a wonderful world for us.

## CARLOS PITA (Spain)

And I think fundamentally there was a reaction to a lot of frivolity or to an excess of consumerism of European architectures. At that time, I think it was the Swiss connection. All these Herzog & de Meuron, that made an impression of Thomas Ruff's photos, that worked with the material, but in a very superficial way. They talked about skins. And I believe that Latin American architecture is an architecture of flesh and blood.

## ARTURO FRANCO (Spain)

The language was already a cultural nexus that finally became the fundamental pretext to begin to study the Latin American territory and thanks to the language you not only discover architects, but you are able to understand what is happening in the places. Let's say that when you travel, you go much deeper into the local cultures. You are able to understand the reason for some of the responses of certain architects and all that because it probably would not have been so easy in other territories.

## JAVIER CORVALÁN (Paraguay)

We the Paraguayans can say that we are super geographic, maybe extremely. Because we have a difference, and that is that we handle a double language. As Humberto Maturana says, we speak with greater capacity, because we have two languages. What I mean by this is that geography is not only marked by political boundaries, but trespassing them, we find an enormous amount of geography named in Guaraní. So, for us it is very different to go through the geography without having this dimension, which I believe others do not have. For an Argentinean, Uruguayan or an ordinary Brazilian, an ordinary citizen, it may mean nothing, or maybe a lot. It may not mean much more than a sound and recognizing that the name of a river, the name of a hill, the name of a city, the name of everything, is in another language. But for Paraguayans, things make more sense in this case, because we handle this double language. And that's where I say that, if we agree that we are geographic, we Paraguayans could say that we are super geographic.

## FERNANDO VIEGAS (Brazil)

I think the most beautiful thing would be to imagine that the role of Latin America today in the world is based on the cultural construction of architecture, making a revision of colonialism. I think that in the broad field, that seems beautiful to me. And I think that is happening. And we are in a very privileged situation here in Paraguay, seeing the works of this whole generation of architects who in some way are telling us how it is possible to think in a post-colonial world without resorting to the same mistakes we used to make. So, I imagine that architecture has the discursive power to speak in each small work, where people can review the mistakes of this recent past.

## ARTURO FRANCO (Spain)

Let's say that I could tell you the conditions that Latin America has to contribute something more than other latitudes and probably it is the need of the population to recover a dignified space. And that need is strength. I believe that the will of the people in Latin America should be our fundamental working material.

## NICOLAS CAMPODONICO (Argentina)

The Latin American subject is attentive to the opportunities that present themselves. Opportunities in terms of place, resources, and the people available to do things, and architecture is no exception. I believe that there is no Latin American architecture in terms of an aesthetic or a style or a technology, because it is a very rich and vast continent. However, this condition of seeking the pertinence of the work to the *place* is what identifies Latin American architecture, which is not all the architecture done in Latin America.

## MAURICIO ROCHA (Mexico)

What Latin America does have, unlike other places, is that there are many marginal areas that are very little seen. There is no operation from architecture, because politics has not helped and we have to find the possibilities to do it. And I believe that there is serious, in-depth research on materials, construction systems and ways of doing things that should definitely lead us to find these types of solutions.

### JORGE SCRIMAGLIO (Argentina)

In our case, there is a time lag due to an attitude that, because we did not have all those elements at hand, we were forced to use traditional elements. And those traditional elements are the ones that, as time goes by, are finding answers as a reason for learning today.

### JOSE MARIA SAEZ (Spain)

In Latinamerica there is a popular architecture, and an informal architecture. And there are architects who take lessons from that condition of non-formalized architecture and, in a condition of scarce resources, invent. So far, this search continues, now in conditions that are not so precarious, but it continues with the same search for inventiveness, organization and intelligence.

### SANDRA BARCLAY (Perú)

I think that, in our countries, resources are always limited. It is a starting point, but at the same time, that is what makes you look a little further. It is definitely going to involve more intelligent solutions to, with few means, achieve the result. Solving problems, but in a totally feasible way. I believe that in Latin America, we are united by these starting points of limited resources and the need to be ingenious.

### CARLOS PITA (Spain)

And the great contribution, I think, is fundamentally the fact that it is an architecture that addresses its reality. An architecture that deepens the knowledge of the place where it is produced.

### ARTURO FRANCO (Spain)

What interests me most is to discover how experimentation can emerge in Latin America thanks to the absence of regulations. Or at least the absence of such strict regulations as you can find in Switzerland or even in Spain. This situation means that you, as an architect, can explore solutions that you can't even imagine, that are unimaginable, that are not possible in Europe, for example. Then different things happen, magical things happen. And suddenly, as you work by intuition or your sense of smell and the calculations are a little more on the margin, the results are unpredictable.

## JEAN PIERRE CROUSSE (Perú)

In Europe, as in other industrialized countries, it ends in the project, in the bidding process. There it ends, and then there is an execution; there is a control of the execution, but the creative process is over. Here in Latin America, the construction process often ends when the work is finished, but sometimes it extends afterwards. So, to prolong, to have extra time to continue with this creative process around an architectural project that is being built, is something invaluable. Invaluable. It is an incredible advantage that we Latin Americans have.

## JAVIER CORVALÁN (Paraguay)

Until recently, or until today, we were quite sedentary in the proposal. Above all, playing with gravity and having matter as our identity card. But today I do not mean to say that this is not valid, but I think it is insufficient. Just thinking of architecture as we have been doing, I think we would be doing an incomplete job. I think we are facing a very big cultural revolution which goes totally against this taste for the material, and for the heavy, that sedentary architecture would propose, but it comes for the virtual, for the immaterial. And today I am very concerned about that. How to get into this channel, into this current, into this virtual, immaterial liquid so that an architecture or a material proposal with which we made ourselves known can continue to be in force?

## JOSÉ CUBILLA (Paraguay)

I believe that we have made mistakes many times. I always talk about the fact that we are afraid to make mistakes. I always think that we take risks, and I think that is the difference with many studios in general, which do not dare to take risks. I think that if there is something I learned from some of my teacher friends, it is that you have to take risks and not be afraid to make mistakes.

## DANIEL MORENO FLORES (Ecuador)

To me, The material condition of architecture is its most relevant feature. To think about how to operate with materiality gives you so many options. Materiality is the result of all thought. It is the result of elaboration, of construction.

## MAURICIO ROCHA (Mexico)

I also believe in the opportunity to work with materials, which in principle are regional, local, stone, earth, wood, but which are used in a very specific way in each of the places. Reading them, reinterpreting them, deconstructing them, and from there, making contemporary architecture interests me a lot. That is, never repeat what has already been done. But I do read it, understand it, and then build a translation of those elements into a technology that demonstrates that the material has another gravity, another lightness, another light in itself. All this, of course, always, inevitably, with a very strong interest in an ethical stance. Very clear that architecture must be political, and that everything we do ultimately has to build dignities.

## JOSÉ MARIA SAEZ (Spain)

So, this condition is much more important now, because we have an ecological emergency, and because if we continue working as we have done for the last 200 years, we will have an accumulated problem that will become, as we already know, something that will necessarily require cultural change. And that cultural change often has to be a return. So, I believe that Latin American architecture has the capacity to recover the basic principles of architecture. Of the relationship between reality and architecture, which was much more direct in other moments.

## ANATXU ZABALBEASCOA (Spain)

Knowing Latin America from an architectural point of view transformed my way of thinking about architecture. I always say also, since then that the architecture of the twenty-first century has to go where architecture has never gone before. And in that sense, I think that what is happening, and has happened, in Latin America is exemplary. That is why, I think, Latin American architecture must be an architecture of coexistence. It should not fall into nostalgia. It should not fall into ideas of recovering what has no future and, on the contrary, it should strengthen the weapons and knowledge it has. It has knowledge, it has tradition, it has understanding of the place and understanding of the circumstance. It has ways to deal with scarcity and must turn that into a model, precisely to make architecture reach where it has never reached before.

Reviewing the set of testimonies that structure this essay, it is important to state that currently from Latin America a network configured by various architectural practices is being woven. This network understands as crucial to the architectural project a series of approaches associated with the geography of the Latin American territory, the material culture and the techniques associated with local knowledge. This is how this group of architectural practices find themselves in a constant vortex of experimentation and innovation, based on the risks they run during each construction process. Recalling Bolaño, *they are some Latinamericans lost in Latin America*<sup>1</sup>, who more than forming an architecture scene, find themselves in a trench. This place cultivates an architecture of resistance that seeks to oppose the architectural models established by globalization. This attitude is the contribution of Latin America to the contemporary condition of architecture.



[1] The quote refers to the first chapter of the book "Los detectives salvajes" [The Wild Detectives] by Roberto Bolaño, entitled "Mexicanos perdidos en México" [Mexicans Lost in Mexico]



# Building Paradoxes

Sebastián Cillóniz

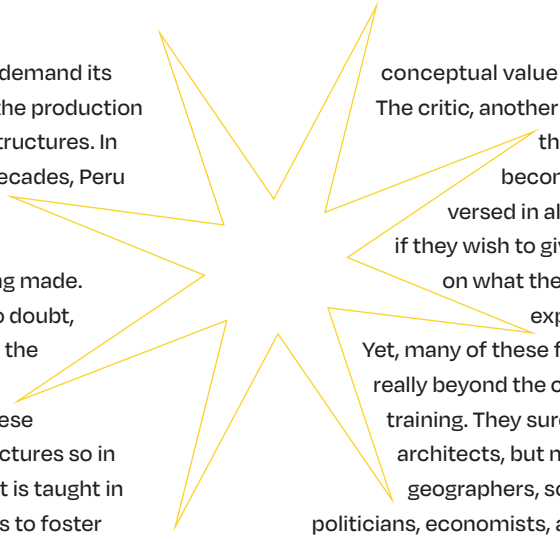
If we want to think of, produce or instigate alternative systems of knowledge within the architectural discourse, let us dive into the root of it all, architectural education. Let's cut the crap about design studios and just watch how everything begins to fall apart.

The studio is the space where architects are formed. The relationship between architects and buildings is a fluctuating one. At times, built form has served as a tool to project a way to see the world. At other times, architects have, in opposition, distanced themselves from built form, but not buildings. The way built form is tackled in design studios fluctuates in resonance. This is the building paradox: the necessity and the obsolescence of buildings. Architects are to be instructed, mainly in design studios, to produce buildings.

In many Latin American schools of architecture today, especially in the one I currently teach<sup>1</sup>, the building is understood as an unequivocal and necessary result of a set of territorial,

historical, geopolitical, environmental — to name a few — problematic conditions. Students have developed a strategic argumentative ability to deductively sieve through these conditions, usually outside architecture, so that a building becomes the evident conclusion to solve most, if not all, of the problems identified by a student. The building becomes an effect of a set of causes that are aptly identified, or strategically created so that a building makes sense.

On the other hand, buildings are in crisis. Built form is imbricated in a carbon based extractive model that cannot sustain itself any longer. This is why a building cannot be revolutionary, because to build is to engage in these models, to ratify them, to represent that power that urgently needs to be transformed. A building is not the answer to these social, environmental or geopolitical problems. However, in our Latin American context, buildings are an undeniable necessity. The Peruvian reality and – without going on a limb – the Global South, have an overwhelming heterogeneity loaded with inequalities



that urgently demand its society with the production of new infrastructures. In the coming decades, Peru should be seeing many buildings being made. Architects, no doubt, will be part of the processes involved in these new infrastructures so in order for what is taught in design studios to foster a competent body of professionals it has to understand the subtleties of the paradox described above: the necessity and the obsolescence of buildings.

Design studios in many undergraduate schools combine the following all-too-familiar pair of conditions. The first is a simulation of professional practice. Through the process of designing a building, understanding its complexities, and pedagogically approaching, critique by critique, the final form, it instructs students in what it is to design a building, what it is they will be doing when they leave school. However, this simulation is handicapped. Students are not subject to important design constraints such as budget, competent engineering, market trends or promoters (state or private) as they are not deemed pedagogically interesting or relevant. Additionally, many other disciplines are contemplated when designing. The students have to insert variables from a myriad of subjects to give

conceptual value to their project. The critic, another architect, is then expected to become someone versed in all these variables if they wish to give real feedback on what the students are expected to tackle. Yet, many of these functions are really beyond the critic's own training. They surely are good architects, but mediocre geographers, sociologists, politicians, economists, and an unfortunately long etcetera. It is ironic to think that one of the most collaborative disciplines in the history of humanity, that of building buildings, is always usually reduced to a single person.

Adding insult to injury, by pretending to simulate the reality of the project, one is prepared to accept unreasonable and exploitative working conditions. Not sleeping and working tirelessly are presumed to be intrinsic agents of professional practice.

The second condition distances itself from the above-mentioned professional training. It focuses more on autonomous aspects of the discipline. There is talk of typologies, concepts, design strategies; diagrams and complex drawings are used. Designing is seen as an act of the irresolute will of an architect where collective and hierarchical criticism simultaneously operates within the language of our discipline.

The architecture student is seen as a rough version of themselves. They presumably already have architectural knowledge as they have been in contact with architecture all their lives. It is also expected that they will be the ones who contribute the knowledge, the authors of their own instruction. This allows for the instructors to forgo the development, rigor and standards that theory and academia demand. They probably never give a proper class or lecture in the studio and substitute bibliography with a search of architectural references.

Most likely, whichever Latin American school of architecture one looks at, these two conditions resonate with the design studios taught there. But is

it only in Latin America? Or are these conditions widespread? After spending time at Columbia's GSAPP I came across a set of design studios that were onesidedly involved in the building paradox. Perhaps in the Global North the necessity of a building is less evident and thus its obsolescence takes center stage as it has done so before in the history of western architecture.

This abandonment of the disciplinary object, but not its representational tools, could be a third condition of contemporary design studios.

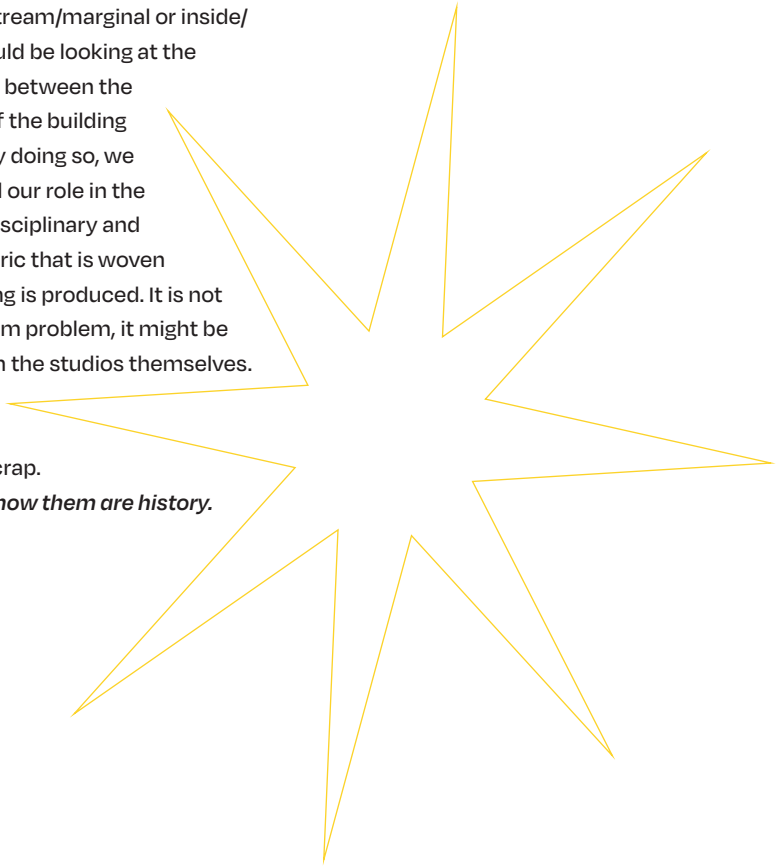
It is through the recognition of these conditions that we can articulate a space of opportunity, a challenging voice from within the studios themselves. By full heartedly embracing the building paradox we can come to terms with the fact that our disciplinary object is still the building. So how do we create a challenging voice from within it?

This issue of *Patio* wishes to "get real" or "cut the crap" by scrutinizing official narratives about our Latin American context. If the design studio is the formal protocol, what is it that needs to permeate it? What informality should hijack formal architectural education? This may be a skewed way of looking

at it. As we have seen in the building paradox, instead of the binaries formal/informal, mainstream/marginal or inside/outside, we should be looking at the point of contact between the obsolescence of the building and its needs. By doing so, we may understand our role in the complex, interdisciplinary and professional fabric that is woven when the building is produced. It is not an us versus them problem, it might be a problem within the studios themselves.

So let's cut the crap.

***Studios as we know them are history.***



<sup>1</sup>Rodolfo Cortegana, Patricia Llosa and myself, since 2021, teach a thesis studio at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú titled: “El edificio como voluntad” (The building as will) that aims to tackle the complex relationship between the architectural discipline, the construction of architectural knowledge through buildings, and the complexities of the Peruvian reality beyond this very knowledge.

# SARA BRONIN ON CONSTRUCTIONS OF PLACE, POLICY AND THE AMERICAN CITY

Luis Miguel Pizano

On February 9, 2022, Professor Sara Bronin – a Mexican American multihyphenate whose professional and academic work spans architecture, law, planning and policy – spoke to the Columbia community at Avery Hall and joined Professor Erica Avrami in conversation. While her lecture focused on preservation practice, guidelines and standards, it was evident that her ideas were informed by intellectual elasticity and multi-disciplinarity. In recent years Professor Bronin has worked on the overhaul of Hartford, Connecticut’s zoning code, developed an urban climate action plan, and written numerous articles and several books. Following her lecture, *Patio Magazine* asked Professor Bronin to sit with us and discuss her work.

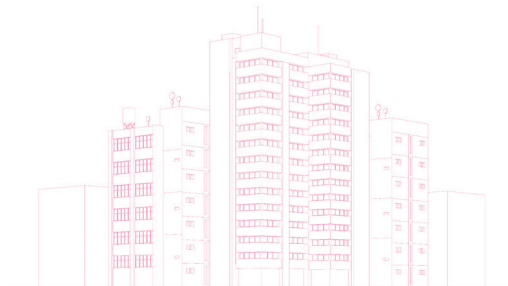


**Luis Miguel Pizano: Professor Bronin, thanks for speaking with us today. I am so excited to talk to you about the many things you have going on right now.**

**Sara Bronin:** Thanks so much! I am really happy to speak with you today.

**LMP:** Your upcoming book *Key to the City*, will explore the different ways in which zoning impacts our lives. As an architect, lawyer, planner, academic and policymaker, your approach to the urban built environment is layered with complexity. How do you make sense of these many layers in producing a comprehensive vision for yourself and your work?

**SB:** Yes, I am fortunate to be able to do work across many disciplines. I would say that what unites all of these pursuits is an interest in promoting and improving place. If I'm writing, I want somebody who picks up the publication to think a little bit differently about a law or policy or issue affecting the quality of their community. If I'm taking on a public service role or working on a legal matter, I usually try to incorporate academic work and data to guide decision-making. A recent project calling on all of these strands is the National Zoning Atlas, which I've just launched out of my lab at Cornell. It combines legal analysis of zoning codes with geospatial mapping. The multidisciplinary teams building it out include lawyers, architects, GIS experts, planners, professors, and students. Once completed, the atlas is likely to be used not only in deep-dive academic research on the impact of zoning, but also by policymakers at the local, state, and national levels. My hope is that if we make zoning more legible to everyone, people will make it better – and benefit both our places and the people they serve.



**LMP:** Improvement is such a helpful framing, particularly as a device for self-motivation. One thing we've been wondering about at Patio is whether it is more important for our professional work to be additive or corrective, given the fraught assumptions that underly the planning of cities. What are your thoughts on this question? Would you say that your work aims to correct something that is poorly conceived or to construct on a process that is good but could be better?

**SB:** That's a great question. I would say that a lot of my policy work has been corrective. Maybe that's an essential tendency of an architect: to look at a place or site as a problem to be solved. In that sense, I guess my architecture school training has translated well into the legal and policy world. In particular, I think that corrective impulse has driven my work on zoning, which is – of course – the local regulation of land that affects virtually all building in this country. When I was on the City of Hartford Planning and Zoning Commission, I realized how problematic our zoning code was for equitable development, sustainability and growth. It was so backwards in so many ways. Lots of us worked together to fix it. More recently, I worked on a statewide effort to enact zoning reforms at the state level that corrected decades-long regulations affecting communities of color. While that effort has not completely corrected what needs to be done, I think we're starting to reverse some of the things that we were doing badly.

**LMP:** Zoning is so interesting. In a way, it seems to be a reaction in itself – born out of tragedies and incidents that illuminate the inaccurate assumptions that we make only years before. Rather than react to tragedy, is zoning moving closer towards a proactive vision for land use regulation? Are there signs of movement that are particularly exciting to you?

**SB:** Yes, I think there's a lot of happening right now in terms of zoning reform. Some cities have drastically shifted the way they think about housing. In some cases, they have allowed people to build more housing in more neighborhoods. In other cases, they have changed more obscure rules, like parking mandates – which I've long maintained should be eliminated. And you also see some movement at the state level. Connecticut, California, Oregon, Vermont, Maine and New Hampshire have made great strides in the last few years, and

I think you'll see more states following them. These reforms are driven by people from all walks of life who have come together for equity, environmental and economic reasons to push for change. That does give you a sense of hope. Perhaps some of these outdated and discriminatory practices that are embedded in land use regulations can be fixed.

**LMP: Do you think there are any specific assumptions that we have yet to correct in the code relative to the way that people live in their homes and organize their household? Is there any progress that you're excited about on that end?**

**SB:** Actually, I wrote an article about this subject. It's called "Zoning for Families," and it's about how our land use laws have defined what a family is and how people relate to each other. Often, a zoning code will say that a family can be any number of related people, but not a group of people unrelated by blood, marriage and/or adoption. Sometimes code will add custodianship and guardianship. The thought that local zoning administrators can articulate standards for what makes a family is – to me – an example of over-confidence. There don't seem to be many changes percolating on this front. Actually, my article argues that there's no good way for zoning codes to define what a family is, because there are so many trade-offs, especially in terms of privacy.

**LMP: Would you say that your Mexican American background has informed your understanding of household formation? Do you think the Latin American multigenerational household "type" can inform the way we do policy in the U.S., particularly in light of the immense growth of Latin American households in 2022?**

**SB:** You know, I actually lived in a multigenerational household with my grandparents, my aunt, my uncle, my parents and my sister for several years. And that was an incredible experience for me as a child. I had all of these relatives to draw from right there in the same house, and my parents had a bit more support than they would have if they had lived in a separate dwelling. So that kind of multi-generational living – where many adults share responsibilities – is an experience that I take with me when thinking about policies governing the diversity of household arrangements. To the extent that my academic or

policy work can influence people and open their minds to this diversity of experience, I really do try to do that.

**LMP:** I think this is such a pressing discussion that we're not having enough, particularly in construction and development circles.

**SB:** Yes, a lack of attention to all of the ways people may want to live certainly limits the kind of product that the market produces. A real estate developer who has a notion of the value of and demand for multi-generational living might be willing to put more units on the market that have – say – two master bedrooms or separate kitchens or multiple front entrances, which can be marketed to families that prefer that lifestyle. We've seen the need for flexible housing during the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many households to combine, recombine, or separate for caretaking purposes or health reasons. I predict, or at least hope, that the market will push for greater flexibility in reaction to what we saw during the



pandemic.

**LMP: ...a pandemic that continues to impact our lives on daily basis.**

**SB:** That's right.

**LMP: I just want to ask one more question about development and the construction of value. What are your thoughts on emerging and alternative frameworks for value creation in real estate – or even the values that developers consider in creating single-family and multifamily products in the city?**

**SB:** Far be it for me to advise an entire industry. That said, I've worked with developers and I understand that there will always be pressure to get a product to the market quickly, whether it's housing or office or retail or another type of use. To do that, a developer will often choose the path of least resistance: doing the same thing they have done before, or choosing a program that will get through the entitlements process fastest. But my hope is that developers will be more innovative in what they offer, and push regulators to be more innovative too. Instead of constructing apartment buildings with just one-bedroom units or office parks that have the typical suburban office park configuration, I think developers have to start to question underlying assumptions about how people want to live. For example, developers across the United States have long assumed that people in apartment buildings want free parking above anything else. However, polls are increasingly showing that people really want walkable communities, which hide car infrastructure, prioritize accessibility and generate multi-modal environments. The rise of millennials who don't want cars, the ongoing pressures of COVID and the critical nature of climate change are shaping our views. Let's hope we all play our part in getting more creative about addressing these challenges and creating awesome communities.

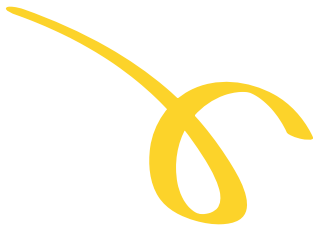
# Debunking Participatory Design

Daniela Beraún

The fragile political, economical and institutional condition of most Latin American countries can easily turn participatory design's noble intentions into a systematic way to perpetuate existing power dynamics. When the participatory process becomes a goal in itself, it gets devoid of its capacity to empower communities and to expand democracy. I see two particular situations we need to be critical about in relation to this. First, when participatory design turns into an aesthetic preference: fragmented, deconstructed, recycled, put together – what we will call scarcity aesthetics. And second, when participatory design is used to support political agendas in lack of better theoretical ground or as a straight up populist tactic.

At its best, participatory design is a form of resistance from the traditional notion of architecture detached from building, and from the figure of the architect as a hierarchical, commanding individual. After the social upheaval of 1968 around the world, and continuing through the first half of the 1970's, it became clear that people wanted change. In architecture, this meant a shift from traditional sources of knowledge towards learning from the broad spectrum of actors involved in building, as well as from "bottom-up" developments. Several movements influenced by the social uprisings – situationists, critical regionalism, student-activists, advocacy architecture, phenomenological affects, the vernacular, etc – saw the architect as a facilitator rather than as someone that aims to represent perfect societies through the purity of forms.

In Latin America, participatory design is inseparable from processes of urbanization and their links to social development and justice. There are many success stories about communities being empowered by the process of building. For instance, when Villa el Salvador established itself in the state-owned desert land in southern Lima in 1971, CUAVES (Comunidad Urbana Autogestionaria de Villa el Salvador) was responsible for block and neighborhood development as well as planning and management of the whole settlement. This community organization was crucial for people from Villa el Salvador to be able to determine their own future and to force the Peruvian government to support their decisions and actions.



Historically, self-help developments in Latin America have been fueled by the prevailing housing crisis and the limited capacity of governments to provide solutions. The lack of viable plans sometimes gets justified by the romanticization that goes along with the narrative of self-building as idiosyncratic of Latin American people. The problem is that the idea of something being a “natural” outcome discourages any questioning and, ultimately, the possibility of change. As Karl Popper mentions in his book “The Poverty of

Historicism”, the belief in the “historical destiny” – that is, the idea that history has an inevitable force that prevails over individual choices – has been used by autocracies to justify the source of their power and the validity of their ideas. Thinking of self-building as something “natural” for Latin American culture risks being caught up in the same tacit compliance, and not looking into the deep rooted inequalities, like access to land ownership, that go back to colonial institutionalized racism and perpetuate regimes of precarity.

Without the reallocation of power, public policies tend to perpetuate the broader economic and political system. In Peru, despite some successful cases like the aforementioned, the most persistent housing policy of the past sixty years has been the promotion of individual lot ownership through mortgage credit and subsidies to buy construction materials. The development of new towns in parallel to the expansion of credit capacity is a pro-market strategy widely supported by right-wing politics, international capital and global agencies. However, it can be debated if self-build as a product of the market diminishes its capacity to empower communities. Devoid from its capacity to organize underrepresented citizens in a politically meaningful way, participatory design becomes just a pragmatic solution to the problem of building in regimes of scarcity. This could lead to governmental agencies to perform like bottom-up organizations, reducing their responsibilities and investment in public spaces, housing, etc.



Spending less and building with low quality materials and construction systems has become an extended practice for many public projects in Latin America. Many of them still exploit the aesthetics of participation in lieu of the lack of any critical imagination of a better city. The aesthetics of scarcity become a style that builds up a polished version of current times and current systems, derailing the attention from important questions. In the Quinta Monroy project, for example, Elemental was working for the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism (MINVU) of Chile. The project is an enactment of neoliberal policies, where location – or potential market value – is favored over material quality. The aesthetics of scarcity, in this case, is a palliative for the fact that the houses are, in fact, half-houses because the concept of the project is an economic calculation. The scarcity aesthetic of this project is also a very tangible embodiment of the same neoliberal system that redirects the cost of finishing the project from the government to the residents, most likely in the form of credit.

Another reason why we need to be critical about participatory processes is the risk of them being used to support populist agendas. Broken democracies can turn participatory design into a propaganda machine to appear more

democratic than they are. For instance, Gran Misión Vivienda, a program from the Venezuelan government to provide affordable housing is framed as to “guarantee the protagonic participation of the communities”. Not so coincidentally, projects built under the program, like the Urbanismo Santa Rosa residential complex in Caracas, use the architectural language of scarcity as to signify democratic ideals that are never fulfilled in reality, neither in the project itself and its participatory intent, nor in the political project of the nation as a whole.

It is difficult, though, to identify real life situations as fully populist, or as “truly” participatory, even with a rigorous oversight of processes and an acute understanding of the local political climate. Complex projects often operate in gray areas. Participatory processes can be strategically designed to make a community feel heard without there being a clear strategy on how to assimilate the information afterwards, or to simply mark a check at an administrative level. Certainly, there are also instances of just failed attempts at incorporating participation into a project. In either case, participatory processes could be deliberately used to, for instance, green light projects that do not have the support of communities, or support reelection campaigns with public resources, while sustaining a false narrative of community empowerment.



Needless to say, not all participatory processes would end up perverted by broken democracies or corrupt politics. But we need to be aware of the precarious dance between what we hope these processes can achieve, and how they really operate within complex political and power dynamics. Nowadays, we cannot assess the success or failure of participatory projects based on their ability to solve the housing crisis, as was the intention of the early 1970's projects. Instead we should hold them accountable in their capacity to organize and maintain political representation for diverse groups of people. Despite everything, true participation can still be a powerful tool to empower communities and to expand democracy.



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# Fritangas: Street artifacts and domestic mutations

Oscar M. Caballero



Misael Reyes, 12 October 2019, Nicaragua. Alamy Stock Photo

In Latin America, a house is like a family heirloom that gets passed on for generations. As many other human artifacts, it is a product of its time. A constant customizable avatar that accommodates new features or disposes of others controlled by the user. In the process of generating change, what happens when the

street is intertwined as an extension of the housing habitat to generate a programmatic paradigm? It becomes a type of “zone 0” where rules are yet to be defined and transformations are rarely held accountable. Sporadic informal artifacts such as domestic “fritangas” become the threshold to another dimension above the urban standard.

In Nicaragua, fritangas are traditional street food businesses, originally informal but sometimes consolidated as restaurants. Regardless of their architectural setting, they exist as an effort to heal a fractured economy and create urban nodes that, unintentionally and through their ubiquitousness, influence a great part of local contemporary culture and gastronomy. Over time, there has been an interesting exponential growth in the number of these housing mutations across the country. Partly due to the pressing economy that has created loopholes for this typology to create a kind of sporadic business to keep a household afloat, built from scraps of the domestic body to create a new body of work.

Undoubtedly, this is a living type of architecture that extracts its parts from household items to build an appendix that will only live on borrowed time every day for a few hours until returning to its original body. In the same way that the Met Cloisters in Manhattan is a staging of a building made of buildings, a fritanga is an assemblage of the patrimony we hold on to—"una puesta en escena"—where characters get to play a second role. There is not one exact to the other, since they adapt to the idiosyncrasy of each of their spatial conditions. The combination of selected objects that are reused and the rearrangeable spaces jointly provide a unique composition. The dynamic of these street artifacts is as volatile as their construction and as unmethodical as their programming. They rarely adhere to zoning regulations, how could they? They lack a permanent body.

There are three main processes to take into account: food preparation, food displaying, and serving/dispatching. Each of these will parasitize from a primary space in order to perform its function. The domestic anatomy gets temporarily shifted as the house makes room to host a new program. The front porch—or sidewalk—is the dedicated stage to perform the fritanga. Other vital spaces fulfill an important role; the kitchen is the core of all operations, either as a centralized space to cook all the food or by the addition of an improvised cooking station in situ which is usually a grill. The living and dining rooms are dismantled and their components are brought to the front in a kind of supportive role to either display food in pots, provide seating for customers, or as a scenography to create a pleasant atmosphere. The domestic user, too, becomes a shapeshifter, as an understudy ready to take on the necessary roles as the cook, food/drinks dispatcher, spokesperson, cashier, or all of the above.

Beyond the architectural implications of these domestic programmatic mutations, the space becomes only the backdrop. The real plot is developed as a tracking circuit, an effective network of positions: resting state, in-motion, and performance. A mechanism triggered by invisible lines of action at the cue of an improvised choreography. Lasting a few hours to then put everything back to where it belongs, and restart again the next day.





# Popular Vernacular

## A Photo Essay

Osvaldo Delbrey Ortiz  
& Gabriela Dávila Rivera

Arches, pastel colors, and the vernacular have been in vogue for the past few years in architecture. Maybe that influence is the root of our obsessions. But one thing is clear, architecture in the Caribbean, and its surrounding Latin American countries, has been on this trend far longer than the “GSAPP aesthetic” made its way into our references.

Back in 2018, we drove for three months through the main island of Puerto Rico with two analog film cameras at hand in search of authentic vernacular architecture. Colorful cement houses with balconies, arches, balusters, columns, and textures showcased an architectural tradition worthy of praise and recognition. While it is in many ways reminiscent of postmodernist architecture, this style we called *Pop Vernacular* carries its own set of rules. For one, it is popular architecture in its entirety, and it is a register of cultural customs, local tendencies, and the local materials available.

Beyond practical matters, this style reflects a collective aesthetic developed by common preconceptions of architecture and also responds architecturally to domestic rituals and

lifestyles. Houses elevated over stilts allow for garage space or a workshop or, most importantly, the occasional, large family gatherings. The flat concrete roofs facilitate building new units on top of the original house in case of family expansion, as common in the rest of Latin America. The lavishly decorated and visible exterior stairs and balconies allow for a vertical circulation that is independent from each unit. An artisan explained, as we photographed his workshop in the town of Toa Baja, how certain religious symbolisms were incorporated into the design of some of his ornamental concrete pieces. The “rosario” baluster resembles an actual Catholic rosary – it’s his most requested model from religious clients. For particularly religious generations, these ornamental elements are as essential as the structural elements themselves.

Today, as young Puerto Ricans struggle to maintain fresh cultural references against the century-long presence of American colonialism, this architectural tradition has had a resurgence, along with reggaetón and other arts, to join the many popular references that distinguish them culturally from the American settlers.

































































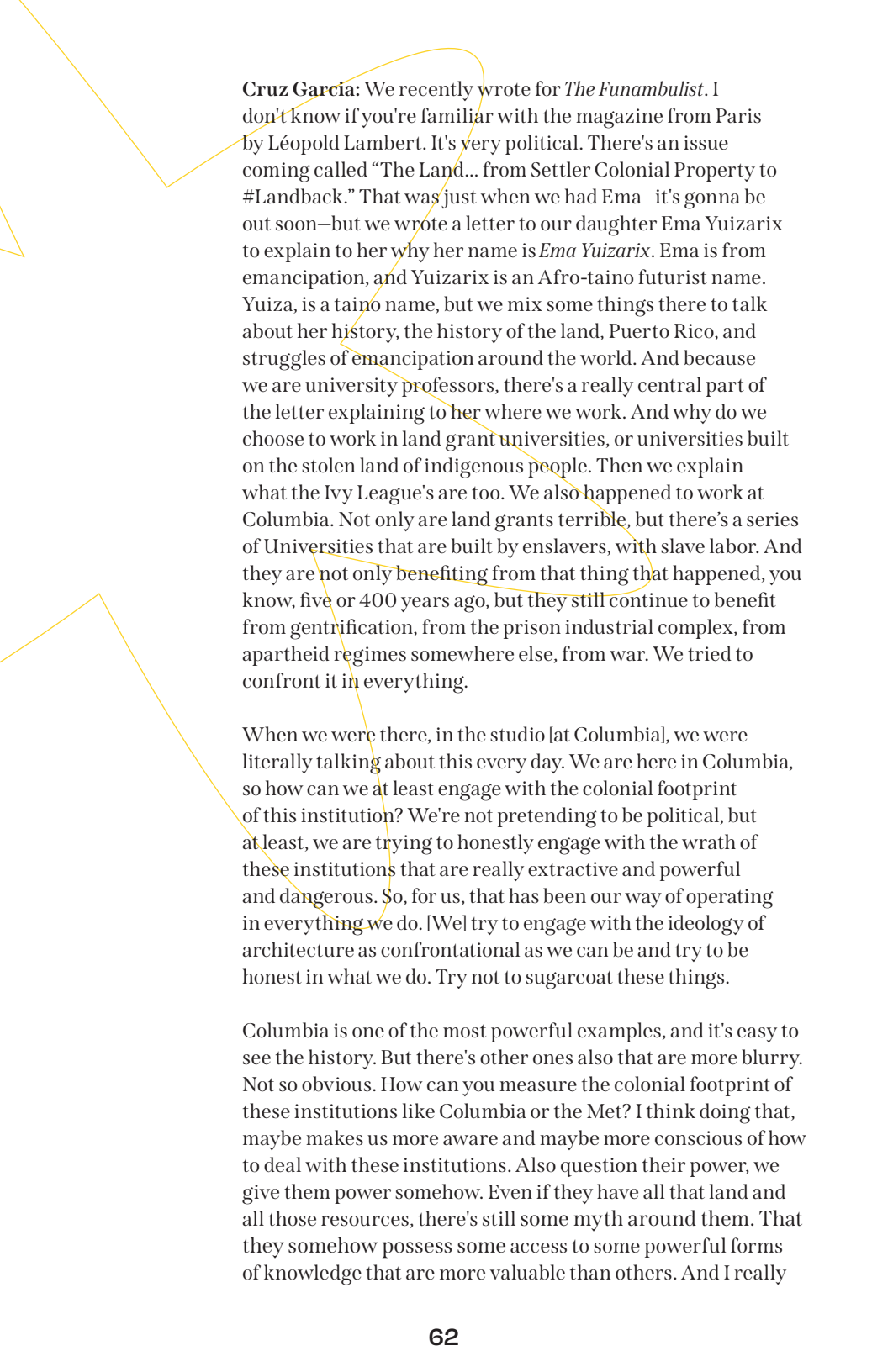
# PATIO INTERVIEWS CRUZ GARCÍA

Osvaldo Delbrey Ortiz

A conversation between  
Cruz, León, and Osvaldo.

Architect and educator Cruz García, along with his partner Nathalie Frankowski, has been on a tour of sorts. Being a black student from a working class family, born and fully educated in Puerto Rico up to graduate level (at the University of Puerto Rico—where I myself went for undergrad), García’s academic career was no stranger to the injustices of colonialism and structural racism, which carried on to his practice. His work is always collective; when he moved to Europe during the financial crisis, he started his partnership with Frankowski. Their work has since focused on speaking truth to power against the imperatives of the architecture establishment, academia, and institutions. They have many names; *WAI Architecture Think Tank*, founded in Brussels in 2008, *Intelligentsia Gallery*, Beijing-based anti-profit art space, and their alternative education platform, *Loudreaders*. Their career has taken them on a nomadic journey across the world—the northern hemisphere, that is; Brussels, Rotterdam, Beijing, in the US, Arizona, Illinois, Nebraska . . . Now they seem to have settled for a while in Iowa where they have a tenure track position. But before heading over to Iowa State University, they made a stop in New York City last summer to teach a studio at Columbia GSAPP. They used to say that they were “academics without academia,” now after a few years of moving through schools, Patio wanted to catch up with Cruz and talk about his Latin Caribbean coming into their academic “tour” and how they position their *real-talk* personas among all these institutions. We covered authorship, their newborn daughter’s name, and a whitewashed European history.



A series of thin, yellow, hand-drawn geometric lines, including triangles and polygons, are scattered across the left and top portions of the page, creating a modern, abstract background.

**Cruz García:** We recently wrote for *The Funambulist*. I don't know if you're familiar with the magazine from Paris by Léopold Lambert. It's very political. There's an issue coming called "The Land... from Settler Colonial Property to #Landback." That was just when we had Ema—it's gonna be out soon—but we wrote a letter to our daughter Ema Yuizarix to explain to her why her name is *Ema Yuizarix*. Ema is from emancipation, and Yuizarix is an Afro-taino futurist name. Yuiza, is a taino name, but we mix some things there to talk about her history, the history of the land, Puerto Rico, and struggles of emancipation around the world. And because we are university professors, there's a really central part of the letter explaining to her where we work. And why do we choose to work in land grant universities, or universities built on the stolen land of indigenous people. Then we explain what the Ivy League's are too. We also happened to work at Columbia. Not only are land grants terrible, but there's a series of Universities that are built by enslavers, with slave labor. And they are not only benefiting from that thing that happened, you know, five or 400 years ago, but they still continue to benefit from gentrification, from the prison industrial complex, from apartheid regimes somewhere else, from war. We tried to confront it in everything.

When we were there, in the studio [at Columbia], we were literally talking about this every day. We are here in Columbia, so how can we at least engage with the colonial footprint of this institution? We're not pretending to be political, but at least, we are trying to honestly engage with the wrath of these institutions that are really extractive and powerful and dangerous. So, for us, that has been our way of operating in everything we do. [We] try to engage with the ideology of architecture as confrontational as we can be and try to be honest in what we do. Try not to sugarcoat these things.

Columbia is one of the most powerful examples, and it's easy to see the history. But there's other ones also that are more blurry. Not so obvious. How can you measure the colonial footprint of these institutions like Columbia or the Met? I think doing that, maybe makes us more aware and maybe more conscious of how to deal with these institutions. Also question their power, we give them power somehow. Even if they have all that land and all those resources, there's still some myth around them. That they somehow possess some access to some powerful forms of knowledge that are more valuable than others. And I really

question that, like many other people do.

So in a way, for us, it's kind of a luxury to go there in the summer, have a nice apartment near our Caribbean brothers and sisters—where I lived there's a bunch of Dominicans—and then teach some amazing students and ask some really hardcore questions and go to museums; try to take all the *semis* [taíno artifacts] back when I went to the MET and I saw that stolen Puerto Rican loot—to take this back home.

**León Duval:** You work with the collage, so how do you and Nathalie, as a collective, understand the idea of authorship? And what's the relation between the power of the collage and the authorship in your work?

**Osvaldo Delbrey Ortiz:** I would also add; not just graphically but also in literary form and theoretically, you go for the idea of the collage in a very broad sense.

**CG:** Yeah, I was gonna say that, it's a really important thing, even for our teaching. How do we teach students to understand that there are no original ideas? I think, on the one hand, understanding the reference is important. Where does it come from? How do you use it? But on the other hand, authorship is something that, for us, we're constantly challenging, in a way. We always work as a collective, always. And I feel like that's the only way we know how to operate. And it's, as you say, literary, conceptual, theoretical, is like archipelagos in a way. I cannot be on an island, isolated. I feel like it's not real, that it's maybe that sort of false sense of genius that European enlightenment wants to sell us and I believe that works are always done collectively. Either you're working with somebody at the moment or you're borrowing and altering ideas and things that have been done by somebody else at some point. So we try to be really conscious about them.

You know, our book, *Pure Hardcore Icons: A Manifesto on Pure Form in Architecture* is kind of a funny book. It's kind of humorous. But the theory is that form making is such a human thing, that to think that, because you make an inverted pyramid, that's your idea, is kind of foolish if you look at the history of humanity. So what happens when we actually understand that context? And we understand that it doesn't matter how cool your inverted pyramid is. That's why the idea of non-referential architecture is a bunch of bullshit. Non-referential architecture is: "I'm arrogant enough to think that



the ideas that I stole from you are more important because I use them and not because you had them before.” That’s basically non-referential architecture. “That’s not really a reference because it doesn’t deserve to be called reference.” It’s basically a whitewashing of history.

We wrote a text that was published in Spanish in *Arquine*, the Mexican magazine. It was in the, I think, 400-year anniversary of Mexico City, so they made a special issue. They commissioned us for a piece. It was the map to utopia, and we made a full text about utopia, where we didn’t write a single word—not a single word. I think it’s 50 or 40-something footnotes of people talking about utopia that we combined, and it kind of makes sense when you read it, but they contradict each other. And I think that’s the most extreme case where we literally didn’t do anything. I feel like that’s our approach more or less. It’s not like we are stealing the things to take authorship over them, it’s that we’re continuing the conversation by acknowledging that they exist, and that they are part of these discourses in a way. So, again, this goes in many different directions, in a theoretical sense, in the sense of collaboration, among us, among students, in the sense of not having to deal with ideas like “oh, somebody did this before.” Obviously, right? If somebody ever accuses us of that, they missed the point of the work. [. . .] But no, I think it’s more exciting and interesting when we are aware of those references. And we’re bringing them into the work. It’s almost like you not only bring the reference, but you also bring the baggage around in the context of the historical infrastructure around it.

**OD:** You criticize the big names in history, and you criticize all this canon that we have to learn, but then you’ll place a large quote by Le Corbusier in the pages of your book. How do you decide what to use, what not to use, and when to engage with something?

**CG:** I think it’s case by case. I avoid telling people what not to do or what to do. So it’s not so much like a didactic thing but rather a complex set of relationships. We use the work of Peter Sloterdijk, who is kind of a conservative philosopher. He’s really useful for our work. And he’s a very Eurocentric philosopher writing about the critique of cynical reason. His theories about cynicism are useful for us, but so are the theories of Achille Mbembe and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui. Le Corbusier is really important for many different reasons, for the good, for the bad. The pluriverse also includes Europe—also.

It's not Europe and the rest of the world, but *also* Europe. They are part of the conversation, but it's a conversation that is much broader, and they're not at the center.

Nathalie is European too. So I mean, there's already an interest, half of our practice has a European formation, because she is European. I am a colonial subject of Europeans too. [Laughs] So in a way to say the opposite would be like being naive or foolish. But understand also, what's the value. Maybe there's no value in other people, so then we don't use them. I avoid talking about Heidegger. I don't write about Kant. I've read them, but I find them completely useless. I mean, Kant is super racist too. Why would I write about this? But then I really like to engage with Walter Gropius a lot. Not for the good, mostly to say that Walter Gropius is a misogynist, and we are basically basing our educational model on a misogynist guy. Or Johannes Itten that was a white supremacist educator and stuff like that. But then we can talk about, again, Achille Mbembe and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, and Ana Lydia Vega, Raquel Salas Rivera, Frantz Fanon. There's philosophy everywhere. And history everywhere. So, if we think of the world like a planetary network of forms of knowledge it also includes those problematic ones.

**LD: You touched on the relationship between Nathalie's nationality and your nationality. How does the narrative that you develop affect you as French-Puerto Rican?**

**CG:** Yes, our intellectual discussions at home?

**LD: Yes, of course. The domestic, what happens there?**

**CG:** For me it is a conversation that has always been important from the beginning because I am always going to attack Europe, it is like my natural instinct. And Nathalie is sometimes like . . . I don't give them a break. But equally, if we take into consideration that even from Europe there is no monolith, that there are also emancipatory discourses, and anti-hegemonic discourses that come from Europe. If we go to Nathalie's father's bookcase, he is also a philosopher and writer, Fanon is there, and there is Wittgenstein, and there is Camus, and there is Wilhelm Reich. There are texts by Angela Davis, and anthologies of Black poets from the US and autobiographies by Malcolm X.

It also seems to me that here in the Americas there is a very homogeneous image of what Europe is. But there are many discourses too. Our decolonizing discourses are very important, but they also have an audience in Europe. And they also have participation because Europe is an empire that has colonies everywhere, and the colony also returns to the empire and tries to work from within.

For us that has almost always been the discussion. Nathalie is very alert and very educated in that sense of understanding contexts and history. She also comes from a particular, pan-European family, with her grandfather who came from Poland, she has family in Scotland, and in Ireland. In the letter that we wrote to our daughter we talked about the emphasis of the struggle here in the Americas, but we also mentioned that there are some struggles for emancipation that are happening in Europe as well. And that is the part that interests us the most because it is more aligned with our thinking.

**LD: That Europeanized imperialist colonialism, you say that part of it is an image, and it is an image that is more useful in America than in Europe.**

**CG:** It's very easy to see, isn't it? And we saw it when we went to the MET, for example. When you go to the MET and see European history, it is the whitest history of Europe you can imagine. But the history of Europe is a whitewashed history too. You can narrate history from any reference point you see fit. You can do it from a colonial standpoint, but they don't focus on that, they focus on three literary works and two images of sculptures that cater to that white supremacist image. Because these institutions were created that way, by slave owners and by people who had an image that was obviously aligned with that philosophy. But in reality that's not even Europe either, when you go there you realize that the struggle is there. That again, they are empires that have a gigantic footprint and that footprint is part of their culture. And their culture continues to change every day, in a perpetual struggle. France has a strike every two weeks. They have to do with immigration and with that colonial footprint, and they have to do with workers' struggles, emancipatory discourses and all that. We can still go to many other countries, and you can see when you're there—unless you go to the Champs Elysee in Paris and you go to a museum like the Louvre—if you go to the banlieue and you go through the city you'll realize that this homogeneous image of that Europe of the white imagination does not exist, or exists

in a very strange way. And in this case, I am not defending Europe, I am trying to paint a more accurate picture.


**OD:** Before the interview I was wondering why you insist on working from these global cities, like Rotterdam, Beijing or Brussels, and not from some subordinate place, but this gives a whole new perspective to the question.

**CG:** If we're talking about anti-racist things, and stuff like that, they are particular maybe to some places. In the US we write in one way, in Latin America, we write in another because we understand that there's different nuances, you know, in the terms in the culture, but they're still valuable questions. In the African context it is different too. In the European context it's different. I feel like we don't understand all of them perfectly. But we're familiar with many of them. Right? Particularly, you know, I think I understand Latin America quite well. Because Puerto Rico is part of Latin America. The US, I understand it quite well, because we [Puerto Rico] are a colonial subject of the US. Europe, I understand it, because they invented the whole thing. They invented white supremacy, they're the fabricators, so it's quite easy to understand. Now in China it is a different story. There are different questions for different places. And there we talk about other things, maybe not in the same terms in a way.

**LD:** Where are your narratives more important? Say, here in this context, or could they be important in Latin America?

**CG:** I feel like our postcolonial narratives... they're not meant for a US American audience, to be honest with you. We've been doing this for several years, and I remember at the beginning, we would show these installations and many people would find them maybe beautiful or whatever, but most of them didn't understand what we're talking about at all. I feel like many people in the US have been stolen from education to understand their own history. So they don't understand how this relates to them. But when we go to do our workshop in Chihuahua, for example, and I ask students to look at the statues around us, and monuments, and try to make postcards, like postcards that reveal the ideology behind all these monuments.

Our work is stronger for the people that can use it as an



instrument. And that's why I also feel that many of the things we do are because students are the ones inviting us. Not necessarily the institutions. I mean, institutions do sometimes, but I feel like since the beginning it was always students. I feel like there's something about that anger that comes from the position of subordination or something like that. Or, how you see yourself in the hierarchy of positions.

When we were in Bogota, many of the things we say that are quite obvious in that context, I think in Europe, somehow, there's a better education of politics, too. I think the US is a particular example of bad education about politics. As we're speaking, there are laws that are being passed to make it illegal to talk about their own history here. So it's been the practice for many, say, hundreds of years, where they try to hide their history. So many people don't know their history. I had to teach about redlining to US American students. And it's like. . . this the history of the places where you live. I mean, the fact that you live in suburbia, you should know why you live in suburbia. The fact that you live in a certain part of the city where people look like you, not like other people, you should know why that is happening? Right? It's not a coincidence. It's not random. And that's a problem.

I feel that education, good education, in Latin America, especially public education, is far superior, in that sense, to the education in the United States. Which means that many of the discourses we're using and the references we're using, people are much better equipped to deal with them in other contexts.

We did a workshop in Arkansas. That was amazing, too, because they had this. . . political awareness about the context where you live that once you find the words to describe it, it's really empowering. How do you find the tools to address them? But like, I feel here, there's such a strong white washing of history within education. And I'm not talking only about the university, like since they're little. Many of these works, especially among architects, like if we present our work, and it's mostly like, maybe US based architects that are trained, you know, by studying Colin Rowe and Peter Eisenman, they have no idea how to engage with the work. Because they have no knowledge about any of the things that we're talking about.

**OD: Is there a difference in how students in the coast vs students in rural areas receive your work?**

**CG:** I mean, it's not really rural, to be fair. I haven't been to a rural place other than Wisconsin, all the other ones are cities, but in the Midwest.

But yeah, we have students from a family of farmers and first-generation students. I think there's a bit of everything. But I think the institution is different. If you need a lot of money to study in a university, you can only get a certain type of student. And they could be different politically, but not the socio-economic class. That's why for me, it's so important to teach in land grant universities, public ones, because you're going to reach students like me, right? I went to public school and I grew up in a ghetto. Those people are going to be mostly in public universities. And it's many more of them. And perhaps they're the ones that, I feel, could potentially transform the context. Because the amount is enough and because of the sort of influence back in the normal parts, in the non-metropolitan parts of the country.

I will say there's so many similarities. And I know more and more because we're doing all these projects across universities. For example, Post-Novis is a collective that has members from UNL, and we presented the things when we were in Carnegie Mellon, or we talked about it with the Loudreaders, there in Columbia, or our Urbana Champaign students are meeting with the students in Columbia and meeting with students in Virginia Tech. At least the [students] that are interested in those discourses, they're really willing to look beyond the sort of elitist facades of these institutions. But we have to acknowledge that many people just go to these places because of that. So that's the reality of the case, because that's the branding of these places. They're exclusive. "The best of the best come here." Which I would beg to differ. But that's how they market their enterprise. That's how they can extract so much money. Even if it's not really their business, their business is real estate.

For me, it's also really important to think about. . . when I'm in Nebraska and Iowa, I'm not here doing a favor, either. It's not like I'm coming to educate "the farmers." You have really bright and critical people and people that are struggling with their own political context too. For example, a gay student that

is thinking about emancipatory practices, but surrounded by a completely homophobic context. On the other hand, just because it's conservative, politically speaking, doesn't mean that it is more backward than, let's say, a Columbia University that doesn't even pay their employees a dignified salary.

**OD:** Is there something on the horizon for WAI or Garcia Frankowski that you're looking forward to?

**CG:** We just keep on working. There's a couple of exhibitions coming. They're a couple of practical projects but... We've been thinking about opening a publishing house, and keep on developing *Loudreaders*. We're working on a book about architectural principles for a general audience. We're working on a house for a trans poet in Puerto Rico. But I think it's more like finding ways to keep on extending those networks of solidarity and those platforms that allow us to engage with many people. I feel like that's the most important thing. We're always thinking about how we can do that. Is it through exhibitions? Is it through some alternative form of teaching? Is it through making a certain type of project? How can we make *Loudreaders* even more pluriversal? And then we'll see but, again, this is a really long, long game that we're playing, like a distance race. And we're trying to figure out how we can be free to make what we want but also to be free to collaborate and to work together with many of the people that we admire and our friends and so on. So that's what we're constantly doing. We've been writing a lot and writing manifestos and a couple of books coming. I think that they all kind of engage in those principles in a way, like public education and so on. I think the project of the *Loudreaders* is really exciting for us, as a principle. The sort of syndico-anarchist networks of solidarity, where we're helping each other and spreading revolutionary propaganda and see what happens after.



# The Latin 'resistance'. Interrogation around the Swedish giant's failure in Latin countries.

Rebecca Carrai

Since the 1970s, IKEA has been 'Swedishising' its brand, enriching its marketing with symbols of Swedishness, rhetoric about egalitarian ambitions, and references to the Northern European Welfare state ideals. The company's narratives were even used by the Swedish government to rebrand its national identity. As Sara Kristoffersson notes, IKEA used pictures of Sweden, and Sweden used IKEA.<sup>1</sup> This combo generated a reciprocal geopolitical power. IKEA stores today are ubiquitous in most parts of the Earth. Europe, the Continent of 'democracies', is its biggest conquest—275 stores—though, already, in 1975, Australia was colonized by this Swedish commercial force; then came Japan in 1977, and, later, in the millennium, even supposedly anti-capitalism Russia was swayed by 'design for everyone'.<sup>2</sup>

## The Latin lacuna

IKEA has historically shaped its national identity and imposed its domestic ideal on a growing list of countries, yet it hasn't enticed Latins—in the sense of linguistics, as in Latin America and Italy—under its wing as yet. This phenomenon calls for interrogation. Why has the Swedish outsider not yet created and imposed an altogether-different form of reality in most of the Global South? Why has its Swedish-oriented system of knowledge—from domestic pedagogical catalogues to the individual items—not landed at all or arrived relatively recently in Latin countries? If some far away areas of Asia and Oceania have already opened their gates to the Swedish colonizer, Africa, South Africa and America still resist. Regardless of the economic boom of some of its countries, South America surprisingly remains almost untouched.

Firstly, some specifications need to be made concerning IKEA's franchising system, which depends on the Inter IKEA Systems B.V. Responsible for the continuous development of the IKEA Concept, it ensures the brand seal and its implementation in new and existing markets.<sup>3</sup> Although some basic principles and directives for marketing may be common to all stores, the specifics, such as products' size or advertising, differ from country to country, and, in turn, are geo-culturally specific. Site-specific marketing cannot be understood without considering individual markets, the economic system, policies and bureaucracy. Logistics don't depend on the Head—the Headquarters in Älmhult where it all began in 1943—but the particular context's actors, working habits, financial, technological capacity and other varying factors. Through an *apparatus* of bodies, capital and economies, IKEA orchestrates national

and foreign policies and coordinates different actors. Not to mention the extensive market research for each country: potential local competitors, consumers' behaviour, trends, advertising spots, lifestyles and so on. The franchising system relies on the context as well as how it is perceived and received. If in developed markets, IKEA is considered a low-priced mass-market brand, in emerging markets, such as Brazil, it targets a growing aspirational middle-class.<sup>4</sup> The 'good design for a low price' motto assumes another connotation from Western developed countries such as the UK, Germany or France.

Brazil, particularly, has long been showing reluctance in accepting IKEA's product ranges. As showcased by Oswald de Andrade in his *Manifesto Antropófago* (1928), Brazil demonstrates an 'art in cannibalising' the cultural models imposed by colonisation: from the ancient Spaniards and Portuguese colonizers to more recent, subtle forms of subjugation enforced by Western, capitalist influences.<sup>5</sup> Here, IKEA is just the icing on the cake. The only BRIC country without an IKEA store, Brazil, presents many reasons to object. From the high taxation on imported goods to competition with local, well inserted, large furniture retailers, familiar with the slow bureaucracy, logistics, and internal transportation, to the lobby-groups of Brazil's large furniture industry promoting protectionism.<sup>6</sup>

Today, among the 17 countries canonically grouped and labelled as Latin American, only Mexico (April 2021), the Dominican Republic (February 2010) and Puerto Rico (March 2013)—surely conditioned by the closeness geographically and culturally with USA—have finally kneeled down and now host an IKEA store. The others feature a Latin lacuna.

## The Italian case: the other Latin conquest

In the 1980s, IKEA started its second wave of global expansion, boosting its purchasing operation with offices in Italy, Finland, Hong Kong and West Germany.<sup>7</sup> Expanding first into the adjacent areas, Norway, Denmark, then Switzerland, where the founder lived, later reaching more exotic places such as Canada or Singapore, the company's expansion went viral. Even in the USA, where similar shopping concepts were already customary—the suburban, drive-in shopping mall, the showroom and DIY concept and so on—IKEA managed to establish its Swedish identity and sign agreements with local players.

In Italy, however, the negotiation and opening of the first store in 1989, Milan Cinisello, didn't go so smoothly and there were more challenges to be faced.<sup>8</sup> A whole year of site-specific research was necessary. The strategy was based on getting to know the Italian culture and political systems to then parody them in appealing advertising campaigns. The themes were Italian, but their reading was completely Swedish. IKEA designed certain images carefully after observation of Italian consumer behaviour and traditions, then, published them in exclusive advertising spots in two of the most-read Italian newspaper supplements: *ViviMilano* and *TuttoMilano*, respectively belonging to *Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica*. A mediatic onslaught was played out. The campaign mixed Swedishness with Italian culture, yet emphasized the need for Italians to look beyond their traditions and trust the foreign as a form of emancipation. Through a juxtaposition of images and words, Italians were encouraged by the entrepreneurial spirit of the economic boom, and even reconsider the nuclear patriarchal family and catholic systems of values. To entice

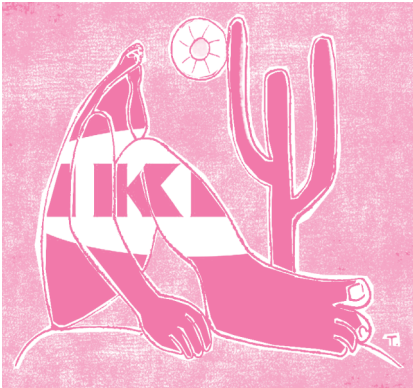
a visit to the (from an Italian point of view) new-format store, IKEA argued: "Even on Sunday" to inform customers that, unlike other local retailers compliant with the religious sabbath day, they were open every day of the week, aligning with a rampant capitalist, neoliberal, non-stop society. If this occurred almost at the beginning of the Ikeaization of Italy, another campaign was launched later for the May 1990 elections. IKEA created seemingly-Italian design-political propaganda mixing the slogans' politics with commercial goals, such as "Faremo seggi che durano": a man sitting on the iconic POEM chair - supposedly embodying politician Giulio Andreotti - promoting Scandinavian design.

Meanwhile, Italian media, such as *La Repubblica*, wrote articles defending 'Made in Italy'. Reminiscent of what is occurring in Latin America, IKEA had long excogitated its arrival in Italy. If IKEA has intended to colonise South America since 2017—Chilean, Brazilian, Peruvian and Colombian stores are already on the company's to-do-list—likewise, already in 1960, founder Ingvar Kamprad visited the Milan Furniture Fair to network with local manufacturers and actors involved in the sale of furniture.<sup>9</sup> But linguistic and cultural differences made it harder for him. In various reports, Kamprad complained about misunderstandings or different customs between Sweden and Italy. Moreover, by then, other types of furnishing companies, mostly small-scale furniture businesses, were established in Italy. There were few large foreign investors at the end of the 1980s, beginning of the 1990s, and those that were traded in the food sector. Basically, an IKEA market sector did not exist so he had to carve it out. IKEA's conquest frightened the non-monopolised Italian media. Articles from *La Repubblica* and *Il*

*Corriere's* archive from 1989-2000—the decade following IKEA's Latin-Italian 'colonization'—feature a bellicose tone and testify to the terror of the Swedish invader particularly in the years following its establishment. After the umpteenth store in Bologna, *La Repubblica* claimed: "The Swede IKEA is preparing the invasion".<sup>10</sup>

Besides dramatic consequences to the Italian economy, people feared the homogenizing of Italian consumption patterns and the abandoning of local manufacturing and shopping traditions: a prediction which turned out to be true. The results are tangible in today's globalised cities eaten up by depersonalisation, market deregulations, and mass-touristification—mainly supported by foreign investors.

### The Latin 'resistance'



Collage by the author of  
Tarsila do Amaral's Abaporu (1928)

Despite initial opposition, the late 1980s Italian mission was a great success. Three years after the initial campaign, the Swede opened another two stores in Northern Italy. Today, Italy is ranked as the sixth country for the number of stores and is third for importation of raw materials. Although the Italian case cannot be entirely put on a par with Brazil—principally due to

its Europeanness and belonging to G7—I argue some analogies between the two Latins can be drawn and brought to light. Both delayed or resisted the entrance to the domineering commercial player; both present a strong national, cultural and design identity. Particularly, their design culture—as englobing fine arts, architecture, sculpture, and product design—deserves closer reading to emphasise their influence on the socio-economic sphere. As posited by Francisco Bullrich, "(i)f a national spirit, or *Volkgeist*, does exist, it is not a historical constant, but a variable, not an impersonal force but a quality residing in the individual. It is the single work of art that contributes to bringing into being such a concept as a national spirit."<sup>11</sup>

When Kamprad approached the Italian market in the 1960s, Italy was already renowned worldwide for its modern design. 'Made in Italy' came later but, as Catharina Rossi argues, craft was vital to the development of Italian design.<sup>12</sup> It shaped Italian design and culture from 1945 to the 1980s. By then, 'Scandinavian design' was relatively unknown to the general public and the DIY formula existed mainly in gardening, bricolage, wholesalers, and low-cost stores, often lacking in design qualities. Even in elite circles such as the Milan Triennale, favouritism towards Italian designers is observable. IKEA and its battle horse, the Swedish-essential clean, white, functional lines, were foreign to most Italians. Despite mutually supporting each other—IKEA matched its logo colours with the Swedish flag's in 1984—Swedishisation struggled to impose its dominance.<sup>13</sup> In fact, I would argue that it was not the commercial propaganda that helped IKEA colonise Italy years later, rather the impelling economic crisis of the 1990s which forced Italians to reconsider and accept this 'other' design into their homes.

On the other side of the world, Latin America, headed by Brazil, similarly distinguished themselves for their uniquely modern design and craft.<sup>14</sup> These, rather than assimilating and accepting Western references uncritically, pivoted on adopting foreign models to propose local alternatives.<sup>15</sup> From Le Corbusier's urban modern theories twisted by Lucio Costa through murals and decorative ceramic walls to Brazilian artist Tarsila do Amaral's incorporating Picasso and French avant-garde art. As Kenneth Frampton suggests in looking at the reciprocal influence between Oscar Niemeyer, Lucio Costa and Le Corbusier, the former retouched the latter's work and helped it blossom into a 'flowering architecture'.<sup>16</sup> Or again, it's enough to think of the Brazilian Italian Lina Bo Bardi and her adaptation of the local vernacular to a modernistic language. Regardless of the variegated external inputs, Brazilians, though, more broadly, South Americans, have tended to constantly filter and revisit these foreign influences according to a certain Latin American taste.

Though historians were tardy in studying the design and cultural potential of this other Latin. Greater attention to Latin American culture and design came about with the *Brazil Builds* exhibition at MoMa in 1943, and, more broadly, when ideas on Critical Regionalism arose in the 1980s and historians, critics, and designers showed interest in looking outside the Western historiographic boundaries.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, from Brazil to Mexico, from Uruguay to Peru, Chile or Venezuela, several valuable contributions arose mixing European modern with regionalist intention and apparent in architecture is a peculiar sensitivity to spatial relationships. What is at stake here is a sort of recurrent capacity to mediate, reformulate and

adapt this foreign influence to their own roots. In Mexico, the International Style was altered to integrate educational murals as showcased by Diego Rivera and others;<sup>18</sup> in Uruguay, Eladio Dieste, recalling Pierluigi Nervi in Italy for his talent, developed a new building technology; in Argentina, Antonio Bonet understood rationalism in socio-economic terms and linked it to technical and climate problems;<sup>19</sup> in Chile, another form of 'Bauhaus pedagogy' flourished in the Ciudad Abierta of Valparaíso.<sup>20</sup> The importation from outside to re-elaborate internally—recalling de Andrade's anthropophagy—is what I define as a form of resistance. Far from neglecting the financial, political and bureaucratic challenges IKEA faces in franchising such foreign territories, one cannot overlook the Latin embedded rebellious spirit, a defence begging the question of who actually 'eats' the other and spreads its light onto design's potential for economic and political engagement.



## Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Sara Kristoffersson, *Design by IKEA. A Cultural History* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 120.

<sup>2</sup> Information from IKEA's webpage and permanent exhibition held at the IKEA Museum in Älmhult, which exhibits the company's historical evolution and achievements on a first national later international level.

<sup>3</sup> 'How the IKEA Franchise System Works', accessed 11 March 2022, <https://about.ikea.com/https://about.ikea.com/en/about-us/the-ikea-franchise-system>.

<sup>4</sup> A broader understanding of the Brazilian market and the pitfalls of foreign brands can be found in the master thesis by Lorenzo De Ruggiero, 'The Luxury Market in Brazil: an analysis of its complexity.' (São Paulo, A Escola de Administração de Empresas de São Paulo da Fundação Getúlio Vargas (FGV EAESP), 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Alessia di Eugenio, 'Un viaggio nella cultura antropofaga brasiliana dal 1922 a oggi', *botequins* (blog), 18 March 2016, accessed 11 March 2022, <https://botequins.wordpress.com/2016/03/18/un-viaggio-nella-cultura-antropofaga-brasiliana-dal-1922-a-oggi/>.

<sup>6</sup> Ana Paula Picasso, 'Why Brazil Still Is a No-Go for IKEA', *Emerging Markets Today* (blog), 3 February 2016, accessed 11 March 2022, <https://emergingmarkets.today/why-brazil-still-is-a-no-go-for-ikea/>.

<sup>7</sup> Eva Alte Bjarnestam, *IKEA. Design & Identity* (Italy: TITEL Books AB for IKEA of Sweden, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Information from the reports written by IKEA's founder, Ingvar Kamprad, during his initial visits to Italy. Documents held in (IHA), IKEA Historical Archives and accessed thanks to the permission of Inter IKEA Systems B.V.

<sup>9</sup> Regarding IKEA's intention to market to Latin American cultures, IKEA's webpage testifies to their 'colonisation' mission. Nine stores are planned within ten years—beginning with Chile, Peru and Colombia. Moreover, the company's web page confirms their will to not only open new stores but also influence other countries' living habits. Looking at India as another case-study of IKEA's Global South expansion, the firm here claims that before opening their first store in Hyderabad, IKEA's staff conducted extensive studies and market research. They visited thousands of Indian homes and attempted to understand this other culture's habits and dreams. More on the company's franchising and marketing strategies can be found in: 'IKEA Stores across the World', accessed 14 March 2022, <https://www.ikea.com/gb/en/this-is-ikea/about-us/reaching-more-of-the-many-people-pub3b03c401>.

<sup>10</sup> Translation by the author. 'IKEA, l'aria in una stanza'. *La Repubblica*, 6 September 1997, accessed 11 March 2022, <https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1997/10/06/ikea-aria-in-una-stanza.html?ref=search>.

<sup>11</sup> Francisco Bullrich, *New Directions in Latin American Architecture* (London: Studio Vista, 1969), 18.

<sup>12</sup> Catharine Rossi, 'Crafting Modern Design in Italy, from Post-War to Postmodernism' (Doctoral Dissertation, London, The Royal College of Art, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> To know more of the history of IKEA's logo colors see: Bjarnestam, *IKEA. Design & Identity*.

<sup>14</sup> Lauro Cavalcanti, *When Brazil Was Modern* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> This thesis is supported by other critics including Martino Tattara's doctoral dissertation; Bullrich, *New Directions in Latin American Architecture*; Carlos Brillembourg, *Latin American Architecture. 1929-1960*. Contemporary Reflections (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Kenneth Frampton, *Latin American Architecture. 1929-1960*. Contemporary Reflections, 35.

<sup>17</sup> Philip L. Goodwin, *Brazil Builds: Architecture New and Old, 1652-1942*. Exhibition catalogue. (1943), <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2304>.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example: 'Integrating Art and Ideology: Murals and Modernist Architecture in Mexico City', *The Metropole* (blog), 30 May 2017, accessed 11 March 2022, <https://themetropole.blog/2017/05/30/integrating-art-and-ideology-murals-and-modernist-architecture-in-mexico-city/>.

<sup>19</sup> More on this via Andrés Ferrari, 'Antonio Bonet—the South American Experience of a Modern Movement Architect', *The Journal of Architecture* 8, no. 4 (1 December 2003): 443–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360236032000167640>.

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance: 'Hidden Architecture » Amereida, Open City. Part 1: The Foundation of the Group and Its Place - Hidden Architecture', accessed 11 March 2022, <http://hiddenarchitecture.net/amereida-open-city-part-1-the-foundation-of-the-group-and-its-place/>.



# Free Confluence Treaty:

Towards an Intellectual Horizontality in  
Architecture Across the American Continent.

Juan Cantú



In recent years, Latin American architects have increasingly gotten involved in academic institutions from the United States, establishing an intellectual exchange between the intellectual discourses of both regions. This emergent phenomenon has been thoroughly documented by *Archivo de Ideas Recibidas*<sup>1</sup>. Their archive has mainly developed through conversations with Latin American architects, artists and designers. However, their presence in the United States has been crucial for unveiling this phenomenon. They have held conversations with Latin American architects which have been prominent at different periods, such as Juvenal Baraco or Barclay & Crousse from Peru, David Barragan from Alborde in Ecuador, Productora from Mexico and Beals & Lyon from Chile. However, among all of these conversations, the experiences of Luis Longhi from Peru, Hernan Diaz Alonso from Argentina, Cristobal Amunategui from Chile, and Tatiana Bilbao from Mexico, although radically different, portray their interactions with the US as a formative experience. Thus, their narrations trace a clear transition from consumers of Western architectural academia in the 20th century to contributors of an overarching intellectual horizontality in the field across the entire American territory today.

In 1984, Luis Longhi, traveled to the University of Pennsylvania to continue his Graduate studies in architecture and sculpture. His interaction with the work

of North American architects, such as Louis Khan and the *conceptualism* that prevailed academia at that moment, influenced his way of approaching architecture. The recognition by and assimilation of Western academia gave him the determination of becoming responsible for a new kind of Peruvian architecture of that time<sup>2</sup>. This is exhibited through his teachings, at the Peruvian University of Applied Sciences (UPC) and at the University of Sciences and Arts of Latin America (UCAL), which focus on formal, technological and experimental objectives as opposed to other academic studios across Latin American Universities that are mostly concerned with social participation, materiality, craftsmanship or territorial regeneration<sup>3</sup>. At this stage there was an influence from the United States to Longhi—not yet the other way around.

In the 90s, Hernan Diaz Alonso had a similar encounter with North American academia. This time, Diaz Alonso was accompanied by his *route companions*, as he refers to those who shared his same trajectory from their place of origin, in Argentina, to Columbia University. During his interview, he attributed this affluence to the economic situation of his country at the time—where the Argentinian peso had the same value as the US dollar<sup>4</sup>. His interaction with North American academia elongated permanently; Diaz Alonso went from being one of its consumers to a key player in its development. Besides his involvement in different North American practices and institutions, he eventually consecrated

Chang Ye, 6 September 2021, Philadelphia.Unsplash Photo

as the director of Sci-Arc, a pioneering institution in the development of form and technology in architecture. Contrary to Longhi's experience, Diaz Alonso was fully assimilated by North American academia, to the extent that even his professional practice is dependent on it.

Throughout the 2000s, Columbia University turned almost unrecognizable for Diaz Alonso and his generation. Later in that decade, the Master of Science in Advanced Architectural Design (MSAAD), the program he attended a decade before, was led by his compatriot Enrique Walker. Thanks to the recognition of Latin American architects as contributors of North American academia, Walker was able to change the program's direction towards a renewed interest in history and theory, radically departing from the 1990s' technocratic agenda that was responsible for Diaz Alonso's formation. At the same time, this recognition also led to his pivotal role in Sci-Arc's transition towards the digital environment that characterizes the school today, when ascending to director in 2015. Concurrently, the direction of architecture schools in the United States influenced by Latin American architects began providing prosperous environments for new methodologies and theoretical frameworks informed by their practices. Examples of these are the Mies Crown Hall Americas Prize at the Illinois Institute of Technology, The South American Project at Harvard GSD and Latin GSAPP at Columbia University, where the interest in the region positioned its architecture at a relevant position within the global discourse.

In 2008 Cristobal Amunátegui attended the newly reformed Columbia University, when Enrique Walker began directing the MSAAD program. Here, his interest



in history and theory, developed during his undergraduate studies at Chile's Catholic University –where he first encountered Walker–, found continuity. This allowed him to delve into North American academia while maintaining an outsider's perspective. He never had to assimilate into traditional Western academia, instead became critical of it. One of his main concerns is *the hyper-conceptualization of things to a point where they get removed from reality*<sup>5</sup>. During his interview, Amunátegui narrates that for this reason, he does not teach studio in the US and instead focuses on history and theory courses, which benefit from this intellectual environment. He has kept his design practice rooted in Santiago, Chile separated from his academic one at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), which allows him to maintain certain autonomy from the US yet enables him to criticize it from within. In previous decades Latin American architects learned from North American institutions and their methodologies. Now they begin to shape them.

Mexican architect Tatiana Bilbao is also part of the Western academic discourse, yet she represents a new

stage in this relationship. Bilbao currently teaches at Yale University School of Architecture, yet, remarkably she does not hold a Master's degree from any North American university or any other institution elsewhere. In her interview she declared that her own alma mater, the Universidad Iberoamericana (IBERO), turned her down from teaching after realizing she has no post-graduate education<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand, Yale, Columbia, Harvard, Rice and other institutions throughout the world have decided to overlook this qualification and recognize that her extensive practical experience is of great value for academia. Bilbao points out the deficit that exists today within Mexican architectural institutions; they fail to incorporate the ideas being generated by its own progeny outside of it. The strong modernist roots they still hold on to create an insular environment adverse to external influence. Whereas the lack of regulation in the construction industry plays in favor of young architects that begin to practice as soon as they come out of school. In the United States these roles seem to be inverted. The rigorous licensure process and immense liabilities young architects face in construction has increasingly pushed them to academia, where new ideas blossom. Despite the apparent dissimilarities between these regions, Bilbao still perceives a symbiotic relationship between the two.



Joey Genovese, 5 February 2021,  
New Haven, CT. Unsplash Photo

Whether it is thanks to economical, political or cultural reasons, the creation of this symbiosis, between practice and academia from both regions can be seen as a progression of influence, where there has been shifting from consumers to contributors. On one extreme, Luis Longhi acquired the ideas on conceptualism, deconstructivism, abstraction and form that proliferated Western academic discourse in the 1980s, to then apply them to the Peruvian context. On the opposite end, Latin American architects today like Cristobal Amunategui or Tatiana Bilbao, have already become important participants of contemporary North American architectural discourse. They actively contribute to the introduction of topics around social integration and architectural materialization that in the past were considered somewhat foreign. Their education as well as professional experience developed in Latin America, yet in the United States they find a platform to express their ideas, even if they encounter certain incompatibility with it. At the center we can observe Hernan Diaz Alonso, where the absorption of North American discourses has turned him into a key figure, with a Latin American formation, but little to no influence from it.

The interaction and exchange between these regions provides the opportunity for recognizing that new modes of teaching and learning outside of traditional Western academia can nurture its discourse. At the same time, the production of architecture in Latin America nurtures from the concepts

and ideas generated in the North. This is evident in the work that is emerging in the region from architects with a North American formation, such as Isaac Michan from Mexico or Felipe Escudero from Ecuador. They utilize the freedom and flexibility of their construction industry to materialize the ideas on form and the integration of new technologies that proliferate in the US. Whether it is through the integration of the multiple voices that participate in the building process or the tangible qualities that appear in local materials and traditional craftsmanship, the cross-pollination that occurs throughout the continent is a great contribution towards establishing an intellectual horizontality in architecture across the entire American territory.

Juan Ordonez, 18 June 2020,  
Cuenca, Ecuador. Unsplash Photo





### Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup>Archivo de Ideas Recibidas is a Latin American project that documents conversations with architects, artists and designers around notions of memory and genealogies, cultural and territorial identity, modes of practice, and academia, and disseminates them through multiple outputs across the internet.

<sup>2</sup>Luis Longhi. "#03 Luis Longhi // Longhi Architects // Arte y Arquitectura." Interview by Asiel Nuñez. Archivo de Ideas Recibidas, October 29, 2019. Video, 23:25. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsk35Xnc5V4&t=171s>

<sup>3</sup>Fabian Dejtari, "Los Mejores Proyectos de estudiantes en Latinoamérica y España 2021", Plataforma Arquitectura, published May 2021, <https://www.plataformaarquitectura.cl/cl/957931/los-mejores-proyectos-de-estudiantes-en-latinoamerica-y-espana-2021>

<sup>4</sup>Hernan Diaz Alonso. "#26 Hernán Díaz Alonso // HDA - X // SCI - Arc." Interview by Asiel Nuñez. Archivo de Ideas Recibidas, February 26, 2020. Video, 22:56. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KoOJ5bUNGo>

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<sup>6</sup>Tatiana Bilbao. "#07 Tatiana Bilbao // Tatiana Bilbao Estudio // Arquitectura." Interview by Asiel Nuñez. Archivo de Ideas Recibidas, February 2, 2020. Video, 30:57. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DU04tKKe-M>

# Atado con Alambre: Scattered Thoughts on an Expression

Galera Collective

*This article has been conceived as a thought/ reflection hybrid about the commonly used Argentinian expression “Atado con alambre”, generally used to indicate a sloppy solution to a problem. But there is an intelligence in extreme pragmatism; an alternative and powerful way of relating with the world. The article mixes the use of English and Spanish as part of the same text, producing a written version of the well-known Spanglish as we attempt to engage with a New York-based publication. This seemingly bad writing allows us to enhance the pragmatic essence and the ideas behind the attitude of the expression.*

### La Silla de Leloir

En el 27 de Octubre de 1979 Federico Leloir, the Argentinian biochemical doctor, won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry. That day, Gente magazine made a portrait of his work space that would go down to posterity. The chair in Leloir's desk seemed to be falling apart and was tied with alambre. The comments about the silla had more relevance in the media than the work itself.

The chair was a literal incarnation of the phrase "atado con alambre". If contemporary Argentinian history had to be represented with 100 objects, one of those would be Leloir's chair.



Source: Revista Gente editorial Atlantida 1970

Photography: Alberto Rodríguez

## "A crisis is also an opportunity"

La palabra crisis en Chinese is formed por dos characters: 危机, (Danger and opportunity). An oxymoron in itself; both a warning and a possibility. When someone says that something is "Atado con alambre" ("tied with wire" in a literal translation), generalmente lo hace as an insult. It means that something is poorly solved, like a cheap and momentaneous thing that never got fixed like it should. But in the crazy times we are living in, in the big crisis of all the things we gave for granted, to be able to solve a problem with minimum resources seems like a pretty good thing.

El Covid, se dice, did not bring anything new, it only accelerated processes that already existed. La crisis of the liberal order that has ruled the world since the mid-20th century se aceleró, por así decirlo. No sólo la economía, si no the political structures and social bonds are changing, and that, in other words, means crisis. The thing with latin people is that we are used to live in a perpetual crisis. Even with the differences between each nation, it's always a feeling, and quite real, that you don't have enough money to do all the things that need to be done. Apply that to every part of life, every time, every day. That 's our lifestyle.

El subdesarrollo, como se le dice, tiene sus cosas muy malas, si. Like inequality, poverty and insecurity, yes. There's even people who claim that here a beautiful life just can't take place. But the thing with latin people is that we developed an incredible capability of adaptation. And turns out that, in crisis time, it's a fundamental skill, like some kind of latino superpower.

When it comes to spatial design, let's say architecture and urbanism, this translates in a "way of thinking" that allows us to solve problems with just

the essential. We are prayers of the praxis. But not only that, it is a source of innovation and problem solving, "si no tenemos las herramientas, entonces las inventamos con lo que tenemos a mano".

Having limits to develop—like 50% of poverty in some regions—te obliga a pensar en la parte esencial de las cosas, y descartar todo el resto. It's not a pose, an ethic or a school, it's not even on purpose, it's the natural outcome of our lifestyle. Para enfrentar los desafíos de cada día, latin people tiene que ser super flexible, super racional y super innovadora. These things are in right now! La diferencia es que we don't do it from una oficina playing ping-pong and drinking some green juice (although sometimes we do). The whole narrative of innovation and aesthetics of espacios estilo google seems fundamentally fake.

En un mundo que se cae a pedazos, inmerso en un cambio de época similar al de principios de siglo pasado, we stand proud of our "latino way of life", you know, it might help us surf the giant wave coming directly toward us.

"Atar con alambre" requiere de una eficiencia, una síntesis conceptual, y una habilidad técnica que es extremadamente difícil de alcanzar. When that becomes your daily basis, you achieve a level of sensei-style mastery, because you went all the way through, you already cut the crap and kept what's really important. Sometimes the result is even ugly, in the traditional sense, but there you find the beauty of pragmatism.

## **Praising the praxis**

When it comes to a project, whatever it is, we consider that our constant material restrictions allow us to solve design problems with much less material resources, than our peers in the "first world". Even if we had the same amount of money at our disposal, simplemente no sabríamos qué hacer con tanta plata.

Los productos que se logran bajo este modus operandi no son wannabes ni copycats de los que surgen de large budgets. These products are not unfinished, and do not go halfway, on the contrary, they are the way we find to accommodate human life under our conditions.



# PATIO INTERVIEWS GERARDO CABALLERO

Rocío Crosetto Brizzio

In the context of this interview Real Talk is understood in the terms of how the architecture that we produce is capable of relating with the real conditions around ourselves. The work of Gerardo Caballero becomes relevant in this approach because of its particular sensibility with La Pampa, Argentina. His engagement with the real is produced through his sharp and consistent focus on what happens around him, with enough sensibility to transfer that reality to powerful architectures, photographs or drawings. In this interview, he discusses with Patio how his work is “cutting the crap” of cleanness and sophistication to relate with a world of sheds, mills and silos in the very core of the Argentinian rural landscape.

**Rocio Crosetto Brizzio:** There is a particular sensibility in the way you understand and address the built environment and the extended landscape of La Pampa, Argentina. This sensibility, I feel, is so valuable because it unfolds both as a poetical and pragmatic response to the existing landscape. I know you have worked and studied in Spain and the US before settling your office in Rosario. Has this distance been influential in how you approach the realness of your context?

**Gerardo Caballero:** Definitely, and I think I was very lucky in that sense. When I graduated from the Architecture School in Rosario, I first went to Barcelona to work, and later I traveled to the US where I studied a Master in Architecture. That distance from Argentina was crucial to me. It allowed me to gain perspective; to really see in a different way the place where I was born and raised. Especially the huge blue sky and the infinite horizon of the rural areas around Rosario. There are some things that we tend to take for granted when we are so close; then when you take distance you have the chance to look again, to see more in there.

There is a popular saying that goes “the foreigner sees more than the local”. Routine can make us blind. My time away from Argentina also made me conscious of the way of producing architecture in Rosario. I never thought of coming back to my country to do what I learned in the US. On the contrary, I came back committed to do architecture by looking and learning at how things are done in Argentina. I wasn't looking at other architects' work in particular; I rather looked at common and ordinary buildings, typical of the rural landscape and the very small villages around Rosario.

**RCB:** That is something really consistent in your work. There is a constant and very particular dialog with the place from where you produce architecture.

**GC:** I believe that if you avoid the real conditions of the place where your work is being produced, you are kind of lost, or out of tone, and your work as well. It could be a parallel of speaking a foreign language that no one can relate to and finally not being able to establish any communication with others. I sometimes say that hopefully things are not as we want them to be, but as they actually are. Things just are as they are, and you have to deal with that as a part of your project. That dimension of reality is a primary source for my work.

**RCB:** This relates also with your constant activity of recording, both through photographs and drawings, the reality around yourself. I know you recently got *Libretas de Viaje* [Traveling Notebooks] published, a book that collects some of your sublime drawings. I say some because I believe you have more than 190 notebooks full of drawings, right? I see both your drawings and photos as a crucial part of your work, as I believe they make you stop to look at what is around you. How does this relate with your work?

**GC:** I started drawing on these notebooks in 1983, so it is a continuous process that started almost 40 years ago. Leo Tolstoy, the Russian writer used to say: "Paint your village and you will paint the world". I believe in that, and the drawings constitute a tool through which I relate to the place where I belong.

**RCB:** As well as the photos, right? I believe they capture very ordinary elements in such a way that allows others to see a particular and alternative beauty in them, beyond our common understanding of these architectures. It feels to me that your photographs give us a second chance; another opportunity to understand the architecture of Rosario and La Pampa. A chance to look again, maybe.

**GC:** The photos and the drawings are the same thing to me. They allow me to relate with the built environment around myself. Some of them are taken from the car, while driving on the road; others are taken in rural areas and in the small villages close to Rosario. I am currently working on a book that will be a collection of some of these photos which will be called *Las Cosas Próximas* [Closer Things].

**RCB:** That sounds great, and it will be amazing to see that collection. I wonder how your work got connected with this, I may say, "alternative vernacular" lecture of La Pampa. Was it that clear from the beginning?

**GC:** I have an anecdote that can frame this better. When I first came back to Rosario after being abroad for a while, the first commission we received was a *Quincho*. This is a typical domestic construction in Argentina; basically a large room, separated from the house, most times in the backyard, which is used to host large meals—especially barbecues—with family and friends.

At first we thought of doing a "Mies-like" pavilion, with a flat concrete roof and large mirrors. But pretty soon we realized

that it was going to be so bizarre to have that strange abstract pavilion in a very small, almost rural town. Then we asked ourselves, so what should we do here? And we thought: un galpón [a shed]. So this is how we probably started building our relationship with the agrarian rural context. For us it was much more coherent to build in that way. We believe we could make interesting reflections by looking at the “ordinary” constructions around.

Also, a commission itself already has lots of restrictions and possibilities. I believe that you do not need to create “additional problems” for yourself through a complicated design. You rather have to address all the restrictions and apparent contradictions and take the rich and unexpected possibilities out of them, in order to construct a project that could “say something relevant or interesting”.

**RCB: And how does your design operation work? Because I have this feeling that you start from the real built environment around yourself, as a place of intellectual departure. You take photographs and you address with a delightful sensibility your context. How is this processed into architectural ideas, strategies, and finally an architecture project?**

**GC:** A long time ago, while I was living in Barcelona I had a conversation with Catalan architect Albert Viaplana, and he said something that I always recall while working. He said that “for the project to be born, you have to kill the idea”. The ideas operate in a very abstract world. In order to arrive at the project you need to deal with “real stuff”. In other words, you need to move from the abstract world to the concrete world.

I believe that projects have to discuss contemporary issues. I like to think that if I look into a project and ask about its materiality, its ethics, its politics or its construction techniques, I will get a coherent and interesting answer. If I interrogate the project on all of these matters and the project is able to get back, then it is not a vulnerable project, but rather it is offering something.  
At least a reflection.

**RCB: I believe that in all of this there is a constant and careful exercise of looking.**

**GC:** The things that you see, the things that you look at are

crucial. I was recently in Venice and while I was visiting the work of Carlo Scarpa I thought “yes, Scarpa is from here, Scarpa belongs to Venice”. If you visit the work of Alvaro Siza, you may say the same, “Siza is Portuguese and so is his architecture”. If you look at Miralles and Gaudí, it makes total sense that both of them were from Barcelona where the Catalan Modernism was so powerful. Each of these people are connected with their places and they have made their architecture part of that reality. Being real is also not being fake.

Also, I always think of my work as a single one, instead of a series of individual projects. My work may have different chapters. It is made of drawings, photographs, projects, thoughts, conversations and so on. In my case, there was a moment in which I realized that what I was doing was what I indeed had the intention to do.

In Argentina, and I believe this is a Latin American condition as well, we work mostly with private clients, which produces a very different scenario for the profession to unfold. While I was working in Spain with Mario Coreia, we would mostly develop public projects: hospitals, schools, parks, cultural centers, public pools, etc. Most times, with private commissions the project has to be conceived as a profitable business, for example when you are working on collective housing, which is mostly promoted by private owners. But of course, that is part of the “dealing with reality” we are talking about.

**RCB: As you mention collective housing, this reminds me of your project in last year's Venice Biennial, in which the topic of collective housing is—literally—put on the table.<sup>1</sup> The theme of the Biennial was How will we live together? Which were the main ideas behind the pavilion?**

**GC:** Everyone thinks that they live in their own house, but the reality is that we all live in the same house: the world. This is the idea of the Infinite House, the name of the pavilion; a house in which we already live together and from which we cannot enter or go out.

Then in order to turn this idea into a Pavilion for Argentina, we started thinking about how this part of living together unfolds in our latitudes. For this, we looked into the Casa Chorizo, a traditional domestic typology for Argentinian houses, which is formed by a series of rooms that align alongside a patio, creating a row of rooms. This house type can also recall the



"Being real is also  
not being fake."

idea of the infinite house, as you can keep adding rooms in this linear sequence. These 4x4x4-meter rooms are generic rooms. They do not have programs. The same space could be used as a bedroom or as a dining room. Either to sleep, to eat or whatever.

And later the pink color came into play. Pink was a really common color for painting the facades of buildings after the country's revolution. Besides being a symbol of union between the colors of two political parties, the pink came from the mixture of animals' blood and limestone. This mixture suited well to both give color and also protect brick walls, as the blood protected the limestone from getting washed by the rain. Actually, our own governmental house is called La Casa Rosada [The Pink House].

So the pavilion is structured around these pink rooms in which we display more than 40 collective housing projects from Argentina, traversing all the national territory. These projects are proof of the vast differences and particularities of each territory, and show how they engage with topographic, climatic and social conditions in every region.

These projects are also divided into three categories. First, projects that have not been built but that we found of particular interest as references of collective housing in Argentina, such as the Housing Towers in la Boca by Katzenstein, Peani, Santos and Solsona from 1958, other housing projects by Amancio Williams, etc. Second, projects from the 60's and 70's that we have called emblematic projects. Finally, a third part that displays what architects are doing today in terms of collective living across the territory of Argentina.

So finally, when we built the pavilion in Venice we thought, Ok then now we need to "furnish" this infinite house. And we thought that the Collective Housing exhibition could be shown as part of this house; in big and large prints that recall bed sheets and tablecloth.

**RCB: Can you mention some referents that you find or have found relevant through your career and work?**

**GC:** Robert Venturi and Denis Scott Brown have always been heroes to me. Learning from Las Vegas proposed revolutionary things that most people at the time thought were trivial, irrelevant, or too ordinary to be part of the architectural

debate. Their ideas were even underestimated by many, whereas for me, *Learning from Las Vegas* was an incredibly revealing book. The ideas around ordinary objects, popular culture, and the so-called “ugliness” were of extreme value for my work.

Most times the most valuable things are just right here; and we just need to change the lens with which we look.



<sup>1</sup> This refers to the printed sheets that showed the Collective Housing Exhibition at The Infinite House Argentinean Pavilion, and which were displayed recalling tablecloth, covering wooden tables across the pink rooms of the pavilion.

# Digital Spaces of Denunciation

Carlos Ortega Arámburo  
& Edgar Rodríguez

It was not until recently that the full effects of the endless scroll of images on our phone and computer screens might have started to become apparent in the practice of architecture. These omnipresent virtual platforms have, for better or worse, significantly influenced and changed the parameters for evaluating the quality and importance of a work of architecture, favoring an algorithmically-curated consumption of images, thus limiting the assessment of a piece of architecture to a high-quality photoshoot and a catchy sequence of overused words. This trend is well and good with private commissions or commercial endeavors where *The Image of Architecture* is part of the end product—but things get problematic when the works involve the interests of governmental bodies and the public treasury. On the one hand, the production of public works of architecture appears to be now contingent on its validation in architecture publications and its mediatic presence rather than on the actual needs or desires of a specific context or population. On the other hand, new spaces of denunciation have emerged on social media to voice out the inadequate working conditions of architectural practices in Mexico today.

For the past three years, since the beginning of the López Obrador administration, Mexico has seen a proliferation of public projects built in small communities and cities as part of an infrastructural renovation strategy modeled after Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration (WPA) called the *Programa de Mejoramiento Urbano* (PMU). The governmental body responsible for this program is the SEDATU (Secretariat of Agrarian, Territorial, and Urban Development for its initials in Spanish) which has allegedly commissioned and built close to 800

works, including sports facilities, schools, parks, public markets, and the like. Unfortunately, the reported results of this strategy to reactivate economic activities on a large scale are solely quantitative. Although local newspapers and their users have diligently exposed the poor quality of some of these projects, features and news concerning these heroic and overly gestural public projects in Mexico have saturated the mainstream architecture media channels.

Said qualities in the projects have naturally attracted the media's attention, which has branded these efforts behind cliché phrases and terms: "positive social impact," "resourceful use of available materials," or other equally vacuous expressions. Glossy photographs of usually empty buildings, impressive wide-angle drone images, and a few overly-positive testimonies prevail over objective post-occupational documentation. Surface and spectacle take over the priorities of architecture, echoing the questionable propaganda strategies employed by the federal government in previous decades. The resulting decontextualized portrayal of the works operates on two levels simultaneously: First, turning them into the perfect material for magazine covers, news reports, and awards recipients both nationally and internationally. And second, such mediatic presence has been instrumental in representing and conveying the 'achievements' and a constructed favorable impact of the strategies initiated by the Secretariat to a larger audience.





This manipulative use of the image of architecture is also elemental to constructing *The Image of the Architect* as a public figure. Since the birth of the *Starchitect* in the 1980s and its role in the field started informing the aspirations of what a successful architecture practice should look and behave like, a new need to protect the architects' image from the public eye began to emerge. With the sole purpose of safeguarding the prestige of their owners, these "creative enterprises" tend to play nice and hide their precarious habits from the public at all costs. In the book *The Favored Circle*, Garry Stevens introduces the concept of habitus (developed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu) as "*a set of internalized dispositions that incline people to act and react in certain ways, and is the end product of what most people would call socialization or enculturation.*" He then adds, "*in Bourdieu's formulation, [habitus] seems to be acting as a sort of feedback loop between social structures and personal practices, and is the vehicle by which he links the two. It is this linkage by which the social order is reproduced—and reproduced so efficiently—through time.*" (Stevens 1998, 57–58)

In a way, this tendency to operate on the edges of lawfulness and under closed curtains has become a habit, rendering the illegal work conditions insignificant to most architects in Mexico. Almost mirroring how poverty, decaying infrastructures, and violence in public space have become natural, invisible, and mute to the general public in Latin American countries; coercion, verbal abuse, and the invasion of private time through the misuse of communication apps are now familiar habits in the architecture work environments. Nevertheless, we have to acknowledge that these illegal, exploitative patterns originate beyond the walls of architectural offices. The poor legal framework and defective public administration within which architects operate define the current situation: a non-existent competition infrastructure paired with governmental agencies with little to no knowledge of planning, budgeting, assigning, and managing these projects.

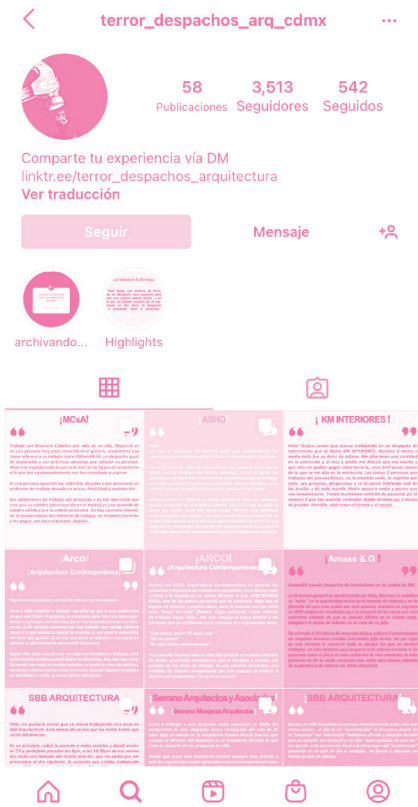
These working conditions have resulted in a new kind of architectural criticism, of *digital spaces of denunciation* that expose the inner workings of architectural offices in a horizontal and open-sourced format. We can trace back the origin of similar practices to the #MeToo movement in 2016. This event sparked a tendency for social media accounts to condemn other



types of exploitation and malpractices in the workplace. The publication of the *Shitty Architecture Men* list in 2018 formalized its eventual manifestation in the architectural field. In this sense, architectural criticism is not unfamiliar to social media; *trolls* have flooded Twitter and other platforms in the past. In Mexico, we have alvar\_haarto and the defunct \_viturbio, two Twitter accounts that operate as architecture *trolls*. However poignant the observations by these accounts are to point out matters of nepotism, favoritism, and the overall idiosyncrasies of the Mexican architecture guild, their efforts fell flat when it came to contributing to the retribution or correction of any malpractice. In this sense, *trolls*, who are by nature insiders due to their access to the information they reveal, have been complicit in maintaining the status quo.

Even though both *trolls* and *digital spaces of denunciation* use the veil of anonymity that the Internet provides as a fundamental aspect of their *modus operandi*, how they use it differs in their relationship with the victims. In her book "Kill All Normies," Angela Nagle states, "*While taboo and anti-moral ideologies festered in the dark corners of the anonymous Internet, the de-anonymized social media platforms, where most young people now develop their political ideas for the first time, became a panopticon, in which the many lived in fear of observation from the eagle eye of an offended organizer of public shaming.*" (Nagle 2017, 18) revealing a need for anonymity in these platforms. A positive side of internet anonymity resides primarily in protecting abuse victims and giving them a safe space to express themselves. This differentia is a critical aspect of the distinction between trolls and virtual activism.

One of the most notable examples of these new spaces of denunciation covering the current situation in Mexico is the account @terror\_despachos\_arq\_cdmx. This account collects the testimonies of employees of architectural practices, some of them participating in the publicly funded projects described in previous paragraphs. The precarious work conditions, questionable hiring processes, and lack of regulations that young architects endure while working for these renowned offices repeatedly show up as you scroll through the posts. We should note, too, that this example is a spinoff of @terrorrestaurantesmx, an account dedicated to uncovering malpractices common in the restaurant industry in Mexico City.



As an aesthetic practice, their use of business software like Excel spreadsheets is particularly commendable: The reversal of the instruments of labor exploitation has generated a more open, collaborative, rigorous mechanism than what the effectiveness of a thread or a rant on social media could ever achieve as an act of transgression. Anonymity is still essential in these new mechanisms of criticism; the administrators of these accounts and channels remain anonymous. Their role is limited to channeling the testimonies of the abused, eliminating the avatar or jester personality of the troll.

In his book "*On Insignificance: The Loss of Meaning in the Post-Material Age*," semiotician Massimo Leone claims:

*Trolls feel so utterly impotent in the traditional conversational arena, unable to convince anyone of anything and, worse, unable to be convinced by anyone about anything, that the only source of empowerment they can rely on is that of breaking the machine of conversation itself, exactly like a player who overthrows the chessboard because he or she is unable to escape checkmate or, with an even more appropriate metaphor, like the child who, not being able to understand how a toy works, breaks it into pieces. Unfortunately, the toy that an increasingly [sic: read increasing] number of trolls is disquietingly seeking to destroy is not a minor one: It is public discourse. (Leone 2019, 31)*

of denouncing the malpractices in architecture offices accelerating together, exhibiting the sad realization that 'progress' or 'transformation' appears to be possible only when illegally overlooking labor rights. Our claim is for public discourse's crucial role in developing a more just and equitable work culture. We see real value in the practices of this new breed of spaces for criticism, as they encourage the debate of these practices and enable the participation of the victims in exposing previously silenced problems. Beyond the transient ridicule that trolling provokes, digital spaces of denunciation are an open window— an opportunity to record and assess what lies behind the screen's surface.

As young architects, we are alarmed to notice a direct correspondence between the pace of ongoing public works in Mexico and the phenomenon



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The background of the page is a light gray color, overlaid with several thin, yellow, abstract line art shapes. These shapes are irregular, flowing lines that create a sense of movement and depth, resembling stylized waves or organic forms. They are scattered across the page, with some larger shapes framing the central text and others smaller, more delicate lines near the bottom.

# That's it?!

I wish I could stay  
on this patio forever.



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